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THE

CHURCH IN DANGER

FROM HERSELF:

BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

S.H. 1829

THE CHURCH IN DANGER FROM HERSELF:

OR,

THE CAUSES OF HER PRESENT DECLINING STATE EXPLAINED.

DEDICATED TO

THE ARCHBISHOPS OF CANTERBURY AND YORK.

BY

THE REV. JOHN ACASTER,

VICAR OF ST. HELEN'S, YORK,

AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF MEXBOROUGH.

"To wish that all men were qualified as their places and dignities require; to hate all sinister and corrupt dealings which hereunto are any let; to covet speedy redress of those things whatsoever thereby the Church sustaineth detriment; these good and virtuous desires cannot offend any but ungodly minds." Hooker, E.P. B. 5.

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MDCCCXXIX.

357.

PRINTED BY J. SEELEY, BUCKINGHAM.

TO THE ARCHBISHOPS OF CANTERBURY AND YORK.

My Lords,

IN presuming to lay before you the following pages, I trust they will be received with the same candour and sincerity with which they were written.

The deviations from the original designs of the Fathers of the Church, which I have ventured to point out, and the abuses which are suffered to prevail in the regulation of her affairs, are so glaring, as to be universally acknowledged; and tend more than any thing else to destroy her usefulness, and to render her unpopular with the great body of the Community.

Should you be induced to consider these matters in the way their importance demands, and to exert that power with which you are invested, to remedy the crying evils of which the nation at large has such great reason to complain; the

church may yet recover the ground she has lost, and again draw back to her the hearts of the people.

But should this opportunity be neglected, and nothing effectually done to render her efficient for the purpose intended; the day cannot be far distant, when the affections of the people being entirely estranged from her, she must fall; nor can all the power of the state preserve her from destruction.

That, aided by Divine Wisdom, you may adopt such measures as will avert the *Disgrace* and *Ruin* with which the Ecclesiastical Establishment of the Country is threatened, is the fervent prayer of

Your Graces'

Most Obedient and

Humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Crown Cottage, York,
1st Jan. 1829.

PREFACE.

ON sending into the world a volume, the title page of which bears upon it something so new and startling, it will probably be thought that an apology for its boldness, or a declaration of the grounds on which it is founded, is particularly demanded.

With regard to the former, the Author will be ready to apologize, when he shall either be convicted of falsehood in his statements, or of unnecessarily obtruding his sentiments before the public. But with regard to the latter, he thinks it due, both to himself and the public, to declare the reasons on which his opinion is founded, respecting the danger with which the Established Church is threatened.

Firmly believing that a national establishment of Christianity is necessary, both for its maintenance and perpetuity; and that the Church of England, as by law established, is, if properly and efficiently governed, peculiarly adapted to answer this purpose; and fully to meet the religious wants of the nation; the Author must necessarily entertain the highest opinion of the Church of which he is a minister.

But however highly he may think of the Ecclesiastical Establishment of the land, he can never forget that it is only a human institution: and that, as such, it is liable to be affected by the infirmity of its ministers; and in proportion only as they are of a right spirit and character, will be its capability to answer the purpose intended.

As then the capability of the church establishment for promoting that which is good, depends, under God, on the fitness of those who are called to administer its sacred ordinances; it must be a matter of the utmost importance, that the higher orders, who direct its affairs, should be men not only of superior attainments, but of sound religion, faithful, apt to teach, not given to filthy lucre; but constantly animated with a religious zeal to promote the honour of God and the salvation of men.

When men of this description are religiously sought for, and appointed to the highest stations in the church, and to ecclesiastical benefices, much good may be expected from them, and much will assuredly follow. But when no such care is taken, and characters of a different description are advanced; evil, and evil only, will be the necessary consequence.

Real religion, not being loved by them, must decay under their administration. A secular spirit will usurp the place of true godliness. This baneful leaven will diffuse itself through every department, and through every duty. Deviations from the original designs and regulations of the founders of the church, will gradually follow. To absorb

her revenues, will be the leading object of her ministers. The souls of men will be neglected, and exposed to danger. God will be greatly dishonoured thereby; and he will shew his displeasure, by raising up other teachers, who shall feed his people according to his design.

Such, it is believed, has been the cause of that departure from the establishment, which is every where witnessed; and of that declining state, in which the church is found: and in no other way can it be accounted for. On this the declaration of the title page is founded. And the leading object of the author has been, in the following pages, to excite the attention of all concerned, to the alarming subject; that they may return to that from whence they have departed, and thus prevent that ruin, to which the national church, it is to be feared, is rapidly advancing.

But however sincere may be the author's design; or however indefensible the evils upon which he has been called to animadvert; he is aware of the prejudice that will be excited against him; nor should he be surprised, were a host of antagonists to buckle on their armour, and make their charge against him on every side. If this conjecture prove true, all he wishes is, that nothing personal may enter into the discussion; but that every thing said or done, may be in such a temper, as will reflect no disgrace, either on our holy profession, or on the character of any concerned. Honest truth requires no dishonest means or unhallowed weapons, in its defence.

When such are used, they injure, or ruin the cause in which they are employed, and increase the mischief they are intended to oppose.

The author, having no sinister purpose to serve, nor any malignant wish to gratify, trusts that such unworthy motives will not be imputed to him; nor any thing else, which cannot be fairly gathered from the facts of the case. He has published his name, and he hopes that no person will appear against him, who does not adopt the same line of conduct. Anonymous attacks, he will consider both unchristian and ungentlemanly. Such writers he will not think himself bound to notice; and therefore he hopes that such as these will not appear.

Whatever may be the opinions advanced in the following pages, the author wishes it to be distinctly understood, that he alone is answerable for them. In pointing out the abuses which he conceives to exist in the administration of the affairs of the church, he stands separate from any of the parties, into which the religious world is unhappily divided. In executing the task imposed upon himself, his wish has been, neither to provoke an adversary, nor to involve a friend. He has come forward as an independent individual; and he will consider it an act of injustice, to impute to others, that which belongs to himself alone.

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THE CHURCH IN DANGER.

CHAPTER I.

The Necessity of a Church Establishment to maintain and perpetuate the Christian Religion through successive generations, and to meet the religious wants of the Nation.

THE Divine Author of our holy religion, after making this important declaration to his disciples just before he left the world—"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" laid this injunction upon them—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

If this important injunction has any meaning, it is clear that He who dictated it intended that his religion should finally be the religion of all nations. Under this impression, and in obedience to his commands, the Apostles, and others

appointed by them, engaged in the stupendous work of evangelizing the world. The Lord working with them by signs and wonders, and by special gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, their success was most abundant. Through their exertions, and those of their successors, the saving truths of the Gospel visited these our distant regions, and Christianity became the avowed and established religion of the land.

If we consider the difficulties against which these holy men had to contend, and the violent measures adopted by their enemies to defeat their great designs, it will be impossible not to perceive in their success the overruling hand and influence of Him who had said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

This important promise clearly extending to their successors to the end of the world; it is evident that He who made it, intended that his religion should not only be universally diffused, but that when once it had made its way into any country, as in the case of our own, it should there be constantly and permanently maintained. But to propagate itself, says Hooker, or to produce the fruits intended by it, is utterly impossible without the help of a spiritual ministry. Hence the necessity of a regularly appointed and successive ministry of this description, to maintain and perpetuate it through successive generations; to administer its appointed sacraments; to meet the

religious wants of the people; and to teach them to observe all things which it is necessary for them to know, believe, and practise, in order to their salvation and happiness both in this world and the next.

Assuming, then, that the Christian religion is from God, and that he intends it to be the religion of all nations; the question to be considered is not, whether it is the duty of every man to embrace and submit to it, as that on which his greatest and highest interests depend; but whether it is not the duty of the civil magistrate, being Christian, to make provision that it may be universally taught to the people over whom he presides, and thus be maintained and perpetuated through successive generations to the end of time. That it is the duty of the civil magistrate, being christian, as far as possible, to provide for all this, is, I think, unquestionable. When such provision is made, there must be that which constitutes what is generally understood by an established religion.

Some, indeed, there have been, and some there are, who have called in question both the expediency, and even the lawfulness, of any national establishment of Christianity whatever. But when it is considered how transient is the life of man,—how very quickly one generation passeth away, and another cometh,—that grace is not hereditary,—and how prone are all to

degenerate from the ways of God, to wander from the truth and to neglect their salvation,—we shall find it necessary to pause before we can acquiesce in the views of those who dispute the necessity of such an important and long established plan.

Is it not contrary to the nature of things, to expect to attain the end, without a proper and diligent use of the means? If this be the case in the ordinary course of things, how much more so is it in the case of man, who in the natural bias of his mind, is utterly opposed to his duty toward God, and the care and salvation of his soul? But to this it is objected, that God will take care of his own cause, and that he has no need either of the feeble help of man, or of the power and patronage of national authority, to accomplish his great designs. In some respects this may all be true: but is it the usual course of Divine proceeding? The very opposite is known to be the case in all temporal matters, and those which concern the subsistence, safety, and welfare of society. To attain all these, there must be a proper attention to, and use of the means. There can be no safety or well being of society without just and equitable laws, and a power vested in the hands of the civil magistrate to administer those laws. The weak must be protected against the power and violence of the strong; and the honest, the virtuous, and the peaceable, against the fraudulent, the vicious, and the turbu-

lent. Such is the appointment of God. Hence the civil magistrate is denominated the minister of God for good; and Christianity has thrown such sacredness over his authority, that it denounces damnation on those who rebelliously resist. If, then, this be the conduct and appointment of God in human affairs, and the awful sanction by which he has guarded the authority of the civil magistrate, for the temporal good of the community over which he presides; are we to suppose that he has left his holy religion, which aims at the highest good of man, destitute? or that he purposes to protect its institutions and professors by a constant miracle, without the agency of that authority which he has conferred on the civil magistrate for the good of the community at large? To entertain a supposition of this description, would be to imagine an absurdity of all others the most absurd. A time was to come, as predicted by the holy prophet, when kings were to be the nursing fathers, and queens the nursing mothers of the church, in this apostate and rebellious world. Under their fostering care and authority, every man was to sit under his own vine and fig-tree, and none should make him afraid. And what can this mean, but that the civil magistrate would take the church under his special and fostering care? that he would protect her from injury and insult? that he would sanction all her

appointments, promote her interests, and so effectually provide for the respect, the maintenance, and the freedom of her instruction and worship, that every member thereof might attend upon both, as well as upon his own private devotions, without either fear or restraint?

That which was here divinely predicted by the prophet, has been long since and happily accomplished in regard to ourselves. But how could this have been accomplished without the concurrence and intervention of the civil power, and the sanction of the state? Or how, for instance, without this sanction, could the designs of God be accomplished in any state, respecting his own appointed institution, the sacred rest and sanctification of the Sabbath? In the communication of that special grace to man, which ends in his salvation, it is clear, that he often does act independently of all human agency. But in regard to the outward means of grace, and the freedom and protection of attending those means, the case is different; and it was clearly His design respecting these and the Sabbath, that they should be cared for by the civil magistrate; and that such measures should be adopted by him, as might be the best calculated to secure the one; and to render sacred in the eyes of the nation that day, which for His own honour and the happiness of man he hath commanded every where to be kept holy. When all this is provided for by the sanction of the state,

there is clearly an established religion, whatever may be the form by which it is distinguished.

And who can doubt for a single moment, either the propriety, the lawfulness, the wisdom, or the necessity of such a provision, by which the people may be taught and instructed in the Christian doctrine, and might attend without fear or danger on the worship of Almighty God? And also in thus guarding against the danger arising from the corrupt nature of man, of losing the knowledge, the religion, the worship, and the very name of God, from the land? For these to exist for any considerable length of time in any land, among any people, and under any circumstances, without the appointed rest, instruction, worship, and sanctification of the Sabbath, as required in the Scriptures; is, from the corrupt nature of man, without a continued miracle, utterly impossible. If, under the most favourable circumstances, and guarded as the sacred day is in this country from all profanation by legislative enactments, by fines and punishments of various kinds, a great portion of the nation neglect the worship of God, and are scarcely restrained from violating it in the most profane and shameful way, and from exercising violence, injury, insult, and persecution against the seriously devout,—what, I ask, would have been the case, had there been no enactments for the sanctification of the one, or the protection of the

other? And what would be the consequences, if these restraints and sanctions of the state were entirely withdrawn? For ourselves, we can appeal to facts in all these respects; but especially in the last, as witnessed within our own recollection, and our own times. The French, in their late revolution, made the experiment; but such a brood of monsters in all kinds of wickedness did they instantly bring to light, that the leaders in this horrible work of banishing Christianity, the Sabbath, and the worship of God from the land, were very soon obliged, for their own safety, and the national existence, to retrace their steps; to return to that from whence they had departed, and to re-establish, corrupt as it was, that religious system, which they found by sad experience to be infinitely better than none.

In those times of rebuke and of blasphemy, our own country was not without its evil men, working in every way to effect the same horrible designs among ourselves. But our religious establishment was formed of different materials from that of our neighbours; and though shaken, with the state, to its very centre, yet with the Scripture for its guide, and Jehovah for its guard, it came out of the furnace somewhat purified, and has ever since, in various respects, been rising in beauty and glory.

But so blind and inconsistent is error, that the stoutest objectors to the religious establishments

of the land, are the most tenacious of the privileges, which in fact these establishments bestow: so little, indeed, are most of them inclined to be interfered with, or to suffer any inconvenience either in their persons or in the invasion of their rights, that they are the very first to complain of any, even the least encroachment; and to seek redress from those protecting laws which the state has provided for all the professors of Christianity throughout the land. But if the state had not been professedly Christian, and if Christianity had not been declared by it to be the established religion of the land, there would have been no protection of this description to which they could look. Christianity, and its real professors, would have been always exposed to the scorn, contempt, and persecution, of the wicked; and there would have been no safety for those who, influenced by its doctrines, and obedient to its laws, separated themselves from the society of their thoughtless and wicked neighbours; and by this declared, that they alone were the children of God. In fact, real Christianity cannot exist but in a state of constant persecution, where it is not professed and protected as the established religion of the land. To entertain the opposite opinion is to do so against the evidence of the most clear and undeniable facts. Left, therefore, to itself, it would only exist in small and detached societies. The great bulk of the nation would have no

means, as they would have no inclination, to be instructed in their duty to God. Either then the Christian religion must be the established religion of the land, and means must be provided for the universal instruction of the people, or the great bulk of the nation must be always in a heathen state, and remain the implacable enemies and constant persecutors of them that are good. But this surely was never the intention of Him whose mercy is over all his works; and whose religion, while it brings glory to himself, breathes nothing but peace on earth, and good will towards men. It was therefore clearly designed to be the universal religion. All nations were to be taught, and none were to be left, if possible, without the constant means to be informed. Nothing but a religious establishment, embracing an universal and successive ministry, can meet these demands. God works his will ordinarily by means, and not by constant miracles. This is the usual course of the Divine proceeding. So our great and wise ancestors thought. They were men of enlarged, enlightened, and liberal minds. At the hazard of their lives, therefore, they projected and accomplished that which merits not the censure, but the respect and admiration of mankind. Raised up by God in troublesome times, and qualified by wisdom, holiness and zeal, to effect the purposes of his mercy and grace towards the nation; they not only delivered us from under the power

and tyranny of the most hateful and dangerous apostacy that ever disgraced and cursed either the church or the world; but they laid a platform, on which they built the ecclesiastical edifice of the realm, so wise and scriptural in its constitution, and so beneficent, expansive, and holy in its designs, that ages yet to come will commemorate with joy and gladness, the wisdom and beneficence of its objects, and of the methods proposed for their accomplishment.

CHAPTER II.

The Church of England, as by law established, is, if properly and efficiently administered, peculiarly adapted to maintain and perpetuate the Christian religion, and to meet in every way the spiritual wants of the nation.

IN laying the foundation and erecting thereon the important edifice of our ecclesiastical polity, the founders of our church proceeded with all that caution, wisdom, and piety, with which they were so eminently endowed. Beside their own salvation, they had no private interests to serve. Their great object, therefore, was the glory of God, the promotion of true religion, and the best and highest interests of their own and succeeding generations of men. With these in view, the Scriptures in their hands, and the fear of God in their hearts, they formed and adapted, as far as possible, all their plans and regulations according to divine truth.

In the prosecution of this great and holy work, in which were combined so many important interests, extending through so many successive ages and generations of men, they wisely adopted that form of ecclesiastical polity which was the most

consonant with the light of revelation, apostolic and primitive practice, and the example of all Christian churches from the earliest period down to their own times.

In coming to this determination, their great learning, their deep piety, their extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, their acquaintance with ecclesiastical history, and their patient investigation of every circumstance connected therewith, or capable of throwing light on the subject, all more or less aided them. And however some may have called in question the certainty of the fact, they will find it difficult, if not impossible, to meet with any authentic instance, wherein any church, regular or dissentient, down to the reformation, bore any other than the episcopal form. This form of church government, while it affords all the advantages which belong to, or can be communicated by, a regular successive and universal ministry for the religious benefit of the nation,—embraces such a wise inspection and superintendence over both ministers and people, for their individual and general good, that nothing can exceed it, if administered by proper and efficient hands; in securing to the church in every age, a regularly continued and orthodox ministry; to the people, a constant attention to their spiritual wants; and to the nation at large, that peace, order, and harmony, which are so essential to the happiness of man.

But however apostolic and scriptural may be the platform of the church to which we belong; and however wisely devised to maintain and propagate the interests of true religion, to promote the best and highest interests of man, and the peace, order, and happiness of the land; it was clearly foreseen by her founders, that she would be totally inefficient for the purposes intended, unless her various offices and departments were filled and administered by duly qualified, honest, faithful, holy, and truly devoted men.

To secure, therefore, as far as possible, this most important point, the founders of the church cautiously and prudently adopted the most wise and practical plans. In short, so important did it appear to them to have a duly qualified, holy, and devoted ministry, that if all the regulations adopted by them for this purpose, were duly and strictly attended to in the fear of God, it would be almost impossible either for an improper person to get into the ministry, or for any one to be retained there, or instituted to any ecclesiastical benefice, unless he was, in the best sense of the terms, truly orthodox in his doctrinal sentiments, and a really converted man.

Next to securing a ministry of this description, the founders of the Church considered it a matter of the utmost importance for her peace and prosperity, the interests of true religion, and the benefit of the people, that this ministry should all enter-

tain and inculcate sound doctrine; and, as far as possible, be of one mind respecting those great and essential truths of Christianity, on the right understanding and faithful and practical reception of which depend entirely the salvation of man.

For this purpose they carefully drew up the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. In these articles is comprised a scriptural summary of all the leading and essential doctrines of Christianity, as inculcated in the word of God. To these doctrines every minister is required, *ex animo*, to subscribe. He is not to understand them in any other way or sense, than the plain, literal, and grammatical meaning of the language used, or to inculcate any doctrine which is contrary thereto, or which cannot be fairly proved from them, in connexion with the word of God. To assist the incompetent, and to shew to all her ministers the manner, application, and use of that kind of instruction which they considered essential for the right information of the people in all necessary truth and duty, the founders of the Church drew up and published the two books of Homilies; and if their intention in this and in every other instance, had been always duly and strictly attended to, in the fear of God, the church in every age would have exhibited a very different aspect from that she has been wont; and we should never have been called either to witness or deplore that sad

and extensive defection from her pale which we every where behold. But all men are not honest; and where there is a want of principle in those who assume the sacred office in the church, the wisest measures for securing her peace and uniformity will be rendered of no avail.

This, however, is no impeachment of the wisdom of her founders, in demanding the uniformity required. On the main points of Christian doctrine there neither can nor ought to be any thing new. This being the case, the honour of God, the salvation of men, and the peace and prosperity of the church, clearly demand that a holy and strict uniformity of sentiment respecting them, should be constantly maintained. To prevent, therefore, a clashing of sentiment, and a war of opposing doctrines, when God has decided on the most essential points, must be desirable in the extreme. Thus saith the Lord, "Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." St. Paul says to the Galatians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." The reasons on which he founded this fearful denunciation were these, "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me, is not after men. For I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it, but

by the revelation of Jesus Christ." In this sentiment all his brethren the apostles exactly agree. If this then does not justify the founders of our church in the conduct they adopted, and in the uniformity they required, it will be hard to say how any thing can be justified, that has ever been adopted, either in the church or the world. The fathers of our church, then, were not bigots when they legislated for the uniformity of that sound doctrine which they required to be held and inculcated within her pale. They were men of sound and expansive minds: they had the fear and love of God in their hearts. They therefore considered the subject in all its bearings, and adopted that line of conduct which, on a large scale, was the most adapted to promote the honour of God, the purity of his holy religion, the peace and safety of the church, and the best and highest interests of men, both in this world and the next. In no other light can they be justly viewed. They were 'giants' in their 'day,'—they were more;—they were clearly and truly the saints and servants of the Most High; and they sealed with their own blood those very doctrines which they thus provided should be uniformly held and taught by the ministers of the church, so long as the church should last. Firmly believing the doctrines they held to be of God, and therefore of the utmost importance to the souls of men, they could not honestly have acted otherwise than they

really did. Others may think differently; but time will shew the truth and wisdom of all their proceedings; and they will be found to stand the test of ages, and remain as monuments of superior minds, when every opposing scheme will have sunk to rise no more.

Beside a truly effective and devoted ministry; and the sound and scriptural doctrines which they intended should be constantly and uniformly held and taught; the founders of our church considered it of the utmost importance, that in the public devotions there should be such a holy union of spirit, and uniformity of manner, in expressing their humble and penitent confessions,—their wants,—and their thanksgivings, to the Father of Mercies, through our Lord Jesus Christ; that the whole church when assembled might fully answer to that holy unity which St. Paul designed when he prayed for the Romans, that they should be so like-minded, "that ye may, (said he,) with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." For this end they compiled and drew up our ecclesiastical forms of devotion and worship. The devout and humble spirit which they breathe, and the comprehensive and expansive manner in which they express all the requests to which the devout worshipper is expected to give utterance, for himself, and others, and the whole of the human kind—render them at once

the most scriptural, rational, chaste, edifying, charitable, and spiritual forms of devotion, that ever were devised for the direction and assistance of a truly christian people in the performance of the most important duties required at their hands. The chief reasons why they are not thus esteemed by all those who ought to use them, and by others who, dissenting from us, have adopted a different mode of religious worship, are, I apprehend, an inadequate sense and feeling of their own wants, weaknesses, and imperfections; and consequently a deficiency in that humble, heartfelt, and sublime devotion, which they so eminently breathe. Let these be rectified, and a very different estimate will be formed of their superior excellency and worth. For ages they have stood the test of all the remarks and criticisms, both of the prejudiced and the profane. A different spirit and feeling respecting them, I am happy to believe, are beginning to be manifested. Real Christians, of every party, are now disposed to take a more charitable view of things in which they differ. To the degree in which this prevails, will the devotional forms of our church rise in the general esteem. The following eulogy on the service of our church, extracted from a presbyterian periodical publication of the United States, I shall give as a specimen of this change. "The church service for the morning is long, but it is not wearisome. So far from it, it is popular

and delightful. The reason is obvious:—the prayers, which are truly devotional, are short; and the service is interspersed with the Liturgy, the lessons for the day, a portion of the Psalms, and the occasional anthems, pealed forth from the deep-toned and melodious organ. The consequence is, that neither mind nor body are fatigued. But if the hearers were to attend during the same length of time, to two or three prayers from well-meaning laymen, as is often the case in our conference meetings, they would bitterly complain."

The quarter from whence this high commendation comes, and it is by no means uncommon, will have more weight with those who worship not with us, than all the arguments in its favour from a thousand friends. How ought it then to raise our edifying and delightful forms of worship in our own estimation, and to excite and stimulate both ministers and people to give them that effect for which they were designed! Let both bring with them to the house of God, that real spirit of devotion which the Scriptures require, then will every bystander catch the sacred flame; he will be convinced of the holy solemnity and superiority of our worship, and 'falling down on his face, will also worship and confess that God is with us of a truth.'

Having thus provided for the inculcation of sound doctrine, the true devotions of the

whole church when assembled for Divine worship,—and a holy and devoted ministry to accomplish and give effect, through the blessing of God, to the whole which they designed; the founders of our church next adopted measures, that as every parish had its church, so every church should have its minister constantly living and residing among the people; who was to make it his constant study, care, and labour, night and day, to bring the whole of his charge, young and old, sick and healthy, into that agreement in the faith, that ripeness and perfection of age in Christ, here, and that meetness for the world to come, which it was the declared design of God to accomplish by the ministry of his grace, and the gospel of His only-begotten Son. This appeared so important and essential for accomplishing the great purpose of God, in the right instruction and salvation of man, that in contemplating all the adjustments of the fathers of the church, it is impossible to mistake their intention. Nothing short of a truly enlightened, holy, active, devoted, and constantly resident ministry, did they ever contemplate. Without it, the holy apparatus, if I may so call it, which they provided for the benefit of the people, cannot possibly be carried into its declared and designed effect. The deviations, which from the necessity of the times they were obliged in some cases to permit, however now perverted and abused, were so

guarded and particular, that it is evident they only intended them to be temporary. Hence, having provided both a morning and evening service, it is clear that they designed their due performance; having distinctly and particularly commanded that beside the service, sermon, or homily in the morning, every minister should for half an hour at least before evening service, on every Sunday through the year, diligently instruct and catechise the children, young people, servants, and ignorant persons, according to the plan provided for them in our brief and comprehensive catechism. Wiser measures than these could not possibly have been devised, to instruct the people in all necessary truth and duty; to meet their wants under all the changes and vicissitudes of life; to maintain and propagate Christianity; and to train up rising and successive generations in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. To secure this latter, as the nature of man is constituted, is a matter of the utmost importance to themselves, to the prosperity of true religion, the stability of the church, the peace, order, and well being of society, and the safety of the state to which they belong. "A child left to himself, bringeth his own mother to shame." This wise and holy aphorism of Solomon is no more true individually than collectively, when applied to the younger members of the church. And there can be no surer way to defeat the wisest plans

for the general good, and to bring into contempt, derision and shame, the church, religion, and the government of the land, than to neglect the religious instruction of the rising generation, and to leave them in this respect to themselves.

To some, perhaps, at first sight, it might appear a strange and rash assumption, should it be stated that to this neglect must be chiefly ascribed the departure of that glory which once shone forth in the religious establishments of the land. Time was, when the ministers of religion, conscious of their awful responsibility, extended their anxious care and attention to the rising generation, in the way and manner which the church designed. The morning was devoted more particularly to the instruction of the adults; and the afternoon to that of the young. By this the latter were prepared for the ranks of the former, and trained up by their parents at home, by their teachers at school, and by their ministers at church, to that religious reverence towards God, that obedience to parents, that regard for all lawful authority in the state, that respect for their superiors, teachers, and masters, and that civility to their equals and inferiors, which Christianity enjoins, and without which, no society can long exist in comfort, honour, or safety. This is the high and happy order which the church and christianity designed. At what time the ministers of the church began to depart from this important practice, may admit

of some dispute: some attribute it to the times of the Commonwealth. It was, indeed, renewed at the restoration: but the inroads made previous to this, and the unnatural preference given to preaching sometime before, to the almost entire exclusion of every thing else which the church had ordained for the general good,—connected with the sort of agents which were then from necessity employed as ministers, caused it to be but partially adopted as an efficient means of instruction; till at length, through the decline of real religion, with few exceptions it was totally laid aside. The rising generation being left without any effective instruction, both at home and abroad, were prepared to throw off all those just restraints which kept their forefathers within bounds. Succeeding generations have improved upon their vices, and hence have issued that profligacy and looseness of manners,—that almost total want of religious principle,—that independence of spirit which will suffer no control,—and that disrespect for parents, magistrates, masters, teachers, and superiors, which, without some great and remarkable change, must end in the total overthrow both of the government, and all the established institutions of the land.

From this, it is to be feared, we are at no great distance. Full half the population of the country, it is calculated, have already left the church and joined the ranks of dissent. Of the principles,

conduct, and character of more than half the remainder, it is not required to give an opinion: but this I will say, that should they depart in the same proportion which the rest have done within the last thirty years,—and there is no reason at present to think that they will not depart in a still more rapid way,—it requires no superior foresight to predict, without pretending to be a prophet, that thirty years from hence the religious establishment of the country will be totally forsaken, if not completely overthrown; and I will leave those who are wise in politics to say, what will then have become of the civil government and constitution of the land.

From this fearful state of things, the truth of which it is impossible to deny, and which it would be worse than wickedness to conceal, it becomes a matter of the greatest importance to ascertain, if possible, the causes of this great and daily increasing departure from an ecclesiastical establishment, venerable for its antiquity, apostolic in its constitution, scriptural in its doctrinal principles, wise and practical in all its adjustments, with a form of religious worship wanting only the sanction of inspiration to make it divine; and therefore calculated beyond every other religious establishment in the world, to answer the purpose intended by it, and to meet in every way the religious wants of the nation. If this case be clearly ascertained, and the writer thinks it may, the

question then will be, What is the remedy to be proposed?

In regard to the first of these points, many in the writer's recollection, seeing the evil, but mistaking the cause, have hazarded a vast variety of contradictory statements, without touching the great question at all. Some, indeed, if we may judge from their statements, come so near the truth, that it can hardly be doubted what are their private sentiments on the point: but to screen themselves from the odium of disclosing the real facts of the case, they have shrewdly disguised their sentiments by pointing only at the effects, judging it easy for those whom it the most concerns, if so disposed, by tracing these effects, to find out the cause. But this is only trifling; and to trifle on such a subject, and when the danger is so imminent and stares us in the face, is a sad indication, if not of want of principle, yet of making light of that which will soon, if left without a remedy, make the heart of the stoutest sad.

With these views of the subject, it is time for him who entertains them to speak out. He is aware of the consequences of such a disclosure, as it regards himself: but feeling the subject in question to be of far greater importance for the general good, than any private interests of his own, he cannot hesitate a moment respecting the line of conduct which he ought to follow, though at the sacrifice of every prospect he may have any reason to form.

It is unnecessary, after what has been said, to state again the high estimation in which the writer holds the religious establishment of the land: but as every reflecting man must know that the wisest schemes devised for the general good will totally fail to accomplish the purpose designed, unless administered by proper and efficient hands, it is here that we must turn our attention, and we shall find that the known and glaring deficiency here, is the chief cause of the danger we have so greatly to deplore. Yes, the chief cause of the declining state of the church has been, and still is, within her own porch; and should she finally fall, (which may God avert) it will be by the suicidal act of her own hand, or rather by the matricidal act of her professed yet unnatural sons.

Strange as this assertion at first sight may appear, it will be found on investigating the design of her founders in all their adjustments for her efficiency, and comparing them with the actual state of things as they now exist within her pale, that great deviations from their implied and declared intentions, have long and extensively prevailed. To these deviations it is believed that all or nearly all the mischief is to be ascribed; and in the following chapter, this will be attempted to be shewn.

CHAPTER III.

Deviations from the Adjustments and Regulations of the Founders of the Church, the cause of her present Inefficiency, and of Dissent throughout the land.

SECTION I.

"To wish that all men were qualified as their places and dignities require; to hate all sinister and corrupt dealings which hereunto are any let; to covet speedy redress of those things whatsoever thereby the church sustaineth detriment;—those good and virtuous desires cannot offend any but ungodly minds." Hooker, E.P. 5. B.

Whether it will be believed that these good and virtuous desires were the exciting cause of this undertaking, is a question that at present cannot be resolved. Firm, however, in the consciousness of my own rectitude, I shall leave others to think for themselves; only observing, that it would be a wiser course rather to consider the evils complained of, and to set about their immediate remedy, than to impute unworthy motives to him who has the courage to point them out.

It has long been the practice both of friends and foes, to impute all the evils whereby 'the church sustaineth detriment,' to the unfitness or negligence of her existing rulers. Strongly as I feel on this subject, I must say, that I am not of this opinion. Many deviations from the original design and adjustments of her founders, had their origin in times long before the present episcopal bench had any existence; and there are others over which they have no control. Every bishop, for instance, on entering on his charge, will necessarily find every incumbency in his diocese already occupied. Should these incumbents, therefore, even all of them, be improper and unworthy persons, and living in the most shameful violation of their solemn engagements, and in the neglect of their duties; it will be found, that for these, however contrary to the design and order of the church, the diocesan is not in the least responsible. But should he countenance them in their evil proceedings, or suffer them to continue therein, the case would then wear a different aspect, and he would clearly become, by his own act, a partaker of other men's sins.

Thus much both in duty and in justice, I have thought it right to state, in order to prevent such a sweeping and indiscriminate charge; it being sufficient for every man to bear his own burden, and to be responsible for his own acts alone.

It has been stated, that the founders of the

church clearly perceived that she would be totally inefficient for the purposes intended, unless all her various offices and departments were filled and administered by duly qualified, honest, faithful, and truly devoted men: and that if all the regulations adopted by them for their choice and appointment were duly attended to, in the fear of God, it would be nearly impossible, either for an improper person to get into the ministry, or for any one to be retained, or instituted to any ecclesiastical benefice, except he was of sound religious principles, and a truly converted man.

However devoutly it is to be wished, that what is here stated should be accomplished, and that to the very highest extent which the founders of the church designed, it will be found in practice a very difficult matter to attain. Were all our spiritual rulers what our church designed they should be, and were they left without control, we might then expect to witness a different state of things, and to see the accomplishment of this important object, so much to be desired. But much of that power supposed to be invested in them, being either suspended or restrained by laws enacted in bad times, and I fear also for bad ends, I conceive it to be very difficult to accomplish, in every instance, either their own intentions for the general good of the church, or the purposes which her founders originally designed.

But whatever hindrances of this description may have been thrown in the way of that authority which was originally conferred on the bishops, for the due administration of their important and responsible office,—there is one part, the power of ordination, still left free and unfettered by any restrictions whatever. This being the case, it behoves them with all seriousness, diligence, and care, as they regard the favour of God, the salvation of men, and the safety of the church, to make that improvement in it which its vast importance demands, and to take heed that they lay hands suddenly on no man. Carelessly to ordain, or under the influence of fear, favour, friendship, rank, or a misdirected kindness, to admit ignorant, worldly, inefficient, and unworthy persons, (who, instead of being moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon them the holy office of a minister, have no higher end in view, than to seek a piece of bread,) will be found, not only a sad perversion of their sacred office and authority, but a partaking of other men's sins. Nay more, it is to become responsible for all the mischief they may do; and for the ruin of all those who, through their negligence or false teaching, may die in their sins. That there has been in every age a great and fearful laxity in this respect, is beyond dispute. Had not this been the case, the church would never have groaned under such a swarm of insufficient and

worthless creatures, as Hooker quaintly observes; and who, besides endangering the souls of millions, have brought the priestly office into much contempt, and tended more than any thing else to alienate the minds of men from the ecclesiastical establishments of the land.

But whatever may have been, or now is the state of the church in this respect, or whatever may be the practice of any of the bishops, we are sure, says Burnet, "that the sense of the church is very different. The truest indication of the sense of the church is to be taken from her language, in her public offices: this is that which she speaks the most frequently and the most publicly." And if we consider this language in connection with the qualifications she requires for the ministerial rank, and the duties connected with it; we shall find that she intended not only to raise the pastoral office to its true, efficient, and original state, but to possess a ministry, worthy the best and the holiest times.

But before we consider this language of the church, it will be necessary to enquire what are the qualifications she demands of those to be ordained; and the examination which they must undergo, before admitted to the sacred office.

The qualifications which the church demands of those to be ordained, are evidently such as clearly indicate the high importance which her founders attached to the personal piety, and the

sound religious principles of a pastor, and his ability to serve God in the church, for the promotion of his glory, and the edification of the people. In the 34th Canon the quality of such as are to be made ministers, is particularly stated. Hence, beside the age required, it is demanded that every candidate shall have taken some degree of school, in either of the Universities; or at the least be able to yield an account of his faith in latin, according to the thirty-nine Articles, and to confirm the same by sufficient testimonies out of the Holy Scriptures; and beside this, that he exhibit letters testimonial of his good life and conversation, under the seal of the College where before he remained; or of three or four grave ministers, together with the subscription and testimony of other credible persons, who have known his life and behaviour, by the space of three years next before. If the persons empowered by this canon to ordain, to examine, and to bear testimony, were all what the church designed, it might be supposed that nothing could have been better devised to prevent unworthy persons from being admitted into the sacred ministry. On trial, however, it was found insufficient for the purpose intended; and to remedy the evil it was found necessary, by an Act of the 13th of Elizabeth, to enjoin, "That none should be made ministers, or admitted to *preach, or administer the sacraments*, being under the age of four and twenty years:

(2.) nor unless he first bring with him to the *bishop of the diocese*, from men *known to the bishop to be of sound religion*, a testimonial both of his honest life, and of *his professing the doctrine expressed in the said Articles:* (3.) nor unless he be able to answer, and render unto the *Ordinary* an account of his faith in latin, according to the said Articles; *or have special gifts or ability to be a preacher:* (4.) nor shall be admitted to the order of deacon or ministry, unless he shall first subscribe the said Articles."

That there had been introduced into the church, either through the connivance, the carelessness, and the want of due examination, on the part of the bishops; or by the false testimonials of the colleges and clergy, men of *unsound religion, without preaching talents, and of immoral lives*, and that to a considerable extent, is obvious from the enactment just stated. An evil of this description must have been publicly known and considerably felt, to demand the interference of parliament. Hooker, who lived and wrote in these times, grievously complains on the subject, "Surely," says he, "the hurt which groweth out of these defects, must needs be exceeding great. In a minister, ignorance and disability to teach is a maim; nor is it held a thing allowable to ordain such, were it not for the avoiding of a greater evil, which the church must needs sustain. But as it fareth in such

cases, the gap which for just considerations we open unto some, letteth in others, through corrupt practices, to whom such favours were never meant, nor should be communicated. The church that should nourish them whose service she needeth, hath obtruded upon her their service who know not otherwise how to live and sustain themselves: these, finding nothing more easy than means to procure the writing of a few lines, to some one or other which hath authority; and nothing more usual than too much facility in condescending unto such requests, are often received into that vocation whereunto their unworthiness is no small disgrace. Let no man spare to tell it them that are not faithful towards God; that burden wilfully his church with such swarms of unworthy creatures. We need not doubt whether God be highly displeased with us, or what the cause of his anger is, if things of so great fear and holiness, as are the least and lowest duties of his service, be thrown wilfully on them, whose not only mean, but scandalous quality, doth defile whatsoever they handle. These eye-sores and blemishes in continual attendance about the service of God's sanctuary, do make them every day fewer that willingly resort unto it, till at length all affection and zeal towards God is extinct in them, through a wearisome contempt of their persons, which for a time only live by religion, and are for

recompence, in fine, the death of the nurse that feedeth them." This cutting reproof must have been richly deserved, else such a man as Hooker would never have used language which reflected so severely on the conduct of his superiors. To excuse themselves, they probably threw all the blame on the canon itself, or on those who were empowered by it to sign testimonials. To remedy therefore these evils, the above clause was enacted, in an act for the ministers of the church to be of sound religion. And wherein, it may be asked, does it differ from the canon under which they had acted?

1. As it regards the age of those admitted to *preach* and administer the sacraments.
2. The *persons allowed* to sign testimonials.
3. *Their knowledge of the matter* for which they are to testify.
4. The *person* to whom the candidate is to render an account of his faith.
5. His having *special gifts or ability to be a preacher.*

That the act which enjoins all these, remains still in force, is, I believe, unquestionable. That it is not complied with by our spiritual rulers, is equally so; and so far as this is deviated from, the intentions both of the church and the state are defeated, and I will not hesitate to say, to the great detriment of the established religion.

I am not ignorant that it is lawful to ordain deacons at the age of twenty-three. But this I apprehend does not authorise them to preach, any more than to administer the sacraments, till the age of twenty-four.

These duties belong to the priestly office, and I have yet to learn how the bishop, by his licence, can set aside the positive injunction of an act of parliament. But about the matter of age, I have no wish to quibble. A more important concern is that of testimonials respecting the honest life and sound religious principles of the candidate. The canon merely says, that the candidate "shall exhibit letters testimonial of his good *life* and *conversation*, under the seal of some college of Cambridge or Oxford, where before he remained, or of three or four grave ministers, together with the subscription and testimony of other credible persons, who have known his life and behaviour by the space of three years next before." But the act says, "That none shall be made minister unless he first bring to the bishop of the diocese, from *men known* to the bishop to be of *sound religion*, testimonials *both of his honest life, and of his professing the doctrines expressed in the thirty-nine Articles.*

Where, then, is the difference? The former merely relates to the good life of the candidate: but the latter, both to his honest life, and his sound religious principles.—Again, all grave

ministers and credible persons are not men of sound religion. As any such might sign the testimonial required, though unknown to the bishop, they might therefore without violating their consciences, recommend persons entertaining heretical notions, and by this introduce men and principles into the church which it was intended utterly to exclude. This, in fact, was the case, and therefore to remedy the evil, it was enacted that the persons signing must be *men known to the bishop to be of sound religion*, and they were to testify respecting the candidate, both of *his honest life, and of his professing the doctrines expressed in the thirty-nine Articles.* In the first case the persons signing testimonials, do undertake for the honest life of the candidate; in the second for his orthodoxy; and this is required to be peremptory, and express, says Burn, and not so far as we know or the like; since it is possible they may not have used the proper means of information: and I see not how any person can truly sign, unless he has really examined the party on all the points which the church demands; and honestly believe in his conscience, says Archbishop Wake, that he is qualified for the order or office, to which he desires to be admitted.

More than this, human prudence could not surely devise to secure the purpose designed; and were all who are empowered to sign and to receive testimonials, strictly honest, and alive

to the importance and responsibility of the ministerial character, and the fearful consequences of being accessory to the introduction into the church of heretical and unworthy men, they would feel it a matter of very serious moment, how and to whom they lent their names for a purpose of such a sacred kind. Fearful indeed it is, that this is not the case; and the ease with which such important documents have been always obtained, shews such a laxity of principle as is greatly to be deplored. On certificates of this description, generally, either clerical or collegiate, it is on all hands confessed that very little confidence can be placed. The rulers of the church, then, must take a different course from that which has hitherto been adopted, or they will be so constantly imposed upon as to defeat their best intentions, to revive the piety of the church, and to raise her in the general esteem. It is painful to be obliged to use language of this description: but is it not also painful in the extreme to place the bishops in such a situation as that they must often either betray their sacred trust, or shew by their honest inquiry or faithful reproof, that they can have little or no confidence in the testimony of many of those who, from their situation and calling, ought to be men of honest simplicity and godly sincerity? The more I consider the subject, the more I am convinced of the embarrassing situation in which they are frequently placed. Still

they have a duty to perform, and on the neglecting or faithful performance of it depends the rising or falling of the church. Let them, then, as men of God, consider this, and constantly remember their fearful responsibility. The right of receiving or rejecting is entirely in their hands. No writ or prohibition from civil courts can either restrain them in the due exercise of their duty, or fetter them in the objects of their choice. Let them, then, in the fear of God, exercise, unfettered either by prejudice, favour, fear, or friendship, an honest and impartial judgment; and receive none, high or low, rich or poor, who do not bring with them all the qualifications which the church demands; else there can be no hope of regaining the ground which we have lost; so that in a very short time the church will certainly fall.

Happy for us, that our great and worthy ancestors did not leave this important matter to the mere testimony or recommendation of any class of men. Desirable indeed it was, to have the testimony required; but they expected other and more minute investigation by the bishop himself. The canon merely says on this head, "that the candidate shall be able to yield an account of his faith in latin, according to the thirty-nine articles of religion, and to confirm the same by sufficient testimonies out of the Holy Scriptures." This speaks of his capability; but it does not say by whom he is to be examined, or to whom he is to

give an account of his faith. The act, therefore, in question, determines this matter, and renders it imperative that he be able to answer and render unto the *Ordinary* an account of his faith in latin, *according to the said Articles.* How far this is attended to in general practice, every one knows, who has been examined for the sacred office, either of deacon, or of priest. The examinations are generally by the chaplain alone; not by the ordinary, as the canon and the law directs. There is therefore a total or nearly total deviation from the intention both of the church and the state; and that man in my opinion must possess a more than common hardihood, who can undertake alone to examine and decide on so grave a question, as whether the persons called before him for about an hour, have all the qualifications for the sacred office which the church designed and the word of God demands. But that it was not the design of the church to intrust so weighty a matter to the decision of any individual, however high his rank, or great his attainments, is beyond dispute. The 35th canon, and which is entitled "The Examination of such as are to be made Ministers," positively says, "That the bishop, before he admit any person to holy orders, shall diligently examine him in the presence of those ministers that shall assist him at the imposition of hands; and if the said bishop have any lawful impediment, he shall cause the

said ministers carefully to examine every such person to be ordained. Provided, that they who shall assist the bishop in examining and laying on of hands, shall be of his cathedral church, if they may conveniently be had, or other sufficient preachers of the same diocese, to the number of three at the least: and if any bishop or suffragan shall admit any to sacred orders, who is not so qualified and examined, as before we have ordained, the archbishop of his province, having notice thereof, and being assisted therein by one bishop, shall suspend the said bishop or suffragan so offending, from making either deacons or priests for the space of two years." To ask how many of the bishops, from their non-compliance with the injunctions here contained, are liable on information to the penalty denounced, might be considered a strange, though a grave and important question. Some there may be who strictly comply with the direction of the canon: but having never heard of such, and I have made some enquiry, I shall leave it to those whom it most concerns, to investigate a matter in which the interests of the church are so deeply concerned. I am aware that it is attempted to be understood that the examination enjoined in the canon, applies only to the questions put to the candidates, in the presence of the assisting ministers, in the ordination service. But the canon itself entirely confutes this supposition, positively stating, " that the

bishop shall admit none to sacred orders, who are not qualified and examined as we have before directed." And what was before directed? why, that every man must be able to answer, and render in latin unto the ordinary, an account of his faith, according to the thirty-nine Articles, and to confirm the same out of the Holy Scriptures. This, I take it, not only confutes the previous supposition, but also distinctly defines the line of examination which must be followed, in regard to the candidate's belief in, and understanding of all the doctrines contained in the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. But which of the bishops, or which of the examining chaplains, conducts his examination according to the directions here contained? I do most solemnly declare that I was never asked one single question about the thirty-nine Articles. I have questioned others at different times and from different dioceses, and they have distinctly stated the same, excepting, in one or two instances, some ensnaring question about the 17th Article. I will not say with some that the examinations are in all cases trifling. In many they are close and difficult. But I will venture to say, that they are not generally in the way and order which the church designed. This, I take it, is such a sad and fatal circumstance to the candidates themselves, and so deeply affecting the interest of true religion and the church, that it cannot be justified, nor ought

it to be persisted in by the bishops, or tolerated by the state. Enough, and more than enough of mischief has resulted from this sad deviation from the declared design and order of the church. To this, more than to any other thing, must be ascribed that great difference of opinion which exists among her ministers, on some of the most important doctrines of religion, dangerous to the souls of men, and inimical to her peace and stability. Nor can this be remedied or prevented, but by a speedy return, and a steady and faithful adherence to her declared and original intentions. Let those, then, who are directed to examine for orders, direct their attention to this great and important point. Let them, indeed, acquire a knowledge of the literary attainments of the candidates, and sift them on all the points which it is necessary for a clergyman to know: but let them above all endeavour to ascertain their real character;—their motives in offering themselves;—their views, intentions, and feelings respecting the sacred office to which they aspire;—their knowledge of the scriptures;—and their private sentiments on all the essential doctrines of Christianity, as contained in the thirty-nine articles. In short, let them so manage their examinations, as to come, if possible, to the knowledge of their hearts. This, I take it, however deviated from in practice, is neither more nor less than what the canons require, and the church demands. She

has prescribed the rule to be observed, the matter to be inquired into, and how her doctrinal articles are to be understood, believed, proved, and confirmed. She requires no foreign aid,—no eighty-seven questions,—no human systems to interpret her meaning. She *is*, and ought to be her own interpreter. What is briefly stated in her articles, she has enlarged upon and explained in her homilies, and her other accredited documents. There she has given the true sense of her own meaning; and had the rulers of the church strictly adhered to the directions she lays down, we should never have had to deplore either the sad divisions within her own pale, or that extensive departure from her, which we every where behold.

But beside the matters already mentioned, the law of the land demands that every person to be ordained priest must have *special gifts or ability to be a preacher*. "In a minister," says Hooker, "ignorance, and disability to teach is a maim, nor is it held a thing allowable to ordain such." St. Paul, in his directions on this subject, particularly mentions an aptness to teach, as one of the essential qualifications necessary to be attended to in every candidate for the sacred ministry. What attention is paid either to the directions of the church, the law of the land, or the word of God in this important matter, is too obvious to require mentioning. Generally,

nay, I may say almost universally, the special gifts and ability of the candidate to be a preacher, is never once inquired into, but is entirely taken upon trust. "It is true," says the London Quarterly Review, "that a liberal education, a moral character certified in a regular form, and a competent knowledge in the peculiar studies of the profession, ascertained by an examination of no great depth, do furnish the usual passports for holy orders: and we know not that any material alteration for the better could be made." But the founders of the church, and St. Paul, thought differently; and an act of parliament has rendered it imperative on the bishop, to ascertain whether the candidate has special gifts, or ability to be a preacher. Surely the reviewers must know that the special gifts, and ability in question, are a different and distinct thing from a liberal education. They have no need therefore to be told that many very learned men are very often totally destitute of the special gifts and ability necessary to be a preacher.

Whatever our spiritual rulers may think of this matter, or however lax and indifferent they may be with regard to the qualifications in question, the present plan of admitting into the ministry men whose disability to preach is notorious, is found such a maim and hindrance where it occurs, as utterly to destroy in the minds of the people all regard for the church, and in many

instances, alas! for religion itself. On this subject, the London Magazine, in an article called 'The Religious World Displayed,' has this observation:—"The churches of the establishment had, in fact, become little better than so many dormitories. Most certainly, at least, they presented, and do still present in general, less to occupy or interest either the understanding or the affections, than any other places of common resort, which it would be easy to name. This is a lamentable truth; but being one, there is no reason why it should not be told. We know not a more perilous experiment for a man of sense to make, whose christianity is not very firmly established indeed, than an exposure of himself to the noxious influence of an ordinary church service. Infidelity, with all its reasoning and all its raillery, has never done a tithe of the mischief to the cause of genuine religion, which has been perpetuated by the mere dulness and imbecility of its professed, and licenced defenders." That this is too sweeping and general a charge, has hardly any need to be stated; but that there is some truth in it, is not to be disputed: and though we may justly complain of such an indiscriminate accusation, yet it is not beneath the dignity of our spiritual rulers, *ab hoste doceri.* Certain it is that dulness and imbecility are not calculated for the taste, disposition, intelligence, and character of the times. No man, whatever may be his rank

or attainments, will be now attended to as a minister of religion, who does not carry his credentials along with him, as an ambassador of Christ; who is not sincerely devoted to the interests of the sacred charge committed to him; and who does not manifest something of those special gifts and ability which the church requires for the accomplishment of that weighty and important business intrusted to his care. A very slight inspection of the state of many of the churches of the establishment will afford evidence, sufficiently ample, of the truth of this remark. Churches therefore may be built, and additional services in them required; but unless particular care is taken to fill them with ministers of sound religion, of special gifts and ability to be preachers, and with hearts truly devoted to their work, as the church demands; they will so totally fail to accomplish the purpose intended, that all the labour and expence attending them, for the present at least, might as well have been spared. Such being the qualifications which the church requires, and the examinations the candidates for the sacred office are to undergo, in order to ascertain their knowledge, their piety, their orthodoxy, and their ability to serve God in his church, and benefit his people, before they are allowed to be ordained; we shall find, on considering the language she uses in her public offices, this important matter still further and particularly

confirmed. "In general, then, this is to be observed," says Bishop Burnet, "that no church before ours, at the Reformation, took a formal sponsion at the altar, from such as were ordained deacon and priest. In reforming the office of ordination, our reformers made both the charge that is given, and the promises that are to be taken, to be very express and solemn; that so both the ordainers and the ordained might be rightly instructed in their duty, and struck with the awe and dread that they ought to be under, in so holy and so important a performance. Pursuant to this, in the ordaining of priests, the questions are put in the name of God and of his Christ, which makes the answers to them to be of the nature of vows and oaths: so that if men do make conscience of any thing, and if it is possible to strike terror into them, the forms of our ordinations are the most effectually contrived for that end that could have been framed.

"The first question that is put, in the office of deacons, is, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office, to serve God, for the promoting of his glory, and edifying of his people?" to which he is to answer, "I trust so." This is the first step by which a man dedicates himself to the service of God, and therefore it ought not to be made by any that has not this Divine vocation. Certainly the answer that is made to this ought to be well

considered; for if any says "I trust so," who yet knows nothing of such motion, and can give no account of it, he lies to the Holy Ghost, and makes his first approach to the altar with a lie in his mouth, and that not to men but to God." It cannot be denied that the question carries a sound in it that seems a little too high. Yet many may be able truly to answer it according to the sense of the church, who may have in their minds some hesitation; but every man that has not the motion implied, must needs know that he has it not; and in this case, to say that he trusts he has, is an offence of the deepest kind.

"The true meaning of it," says Bishop Burnet, "must be resolved thus:—the motives that ought to determine a man to dedicate himself to the ministering in the church, are a zeal for promoting the glory of God, for raising the honour of the Christian religion, for the making it to be better understood, and more submitted to. He that loves it, and feels the excellency of it in himself, that has a due sense of God's goodness in it to mankind, and that is entirely possessed with that, will feel a zeal within himself for communicating that to others, that so the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, may be more universally glorified and served by his creatures. And when to this he has added a concern for the souls of [redacted] a tenderness for them, a zeal to rescue th

endless misery, and a desire to put them in the way of everlasting happiness; and from these motives feels in himself a desire to dedicate his life and labours to those ends; and in order to them, studies to understand the Scriptures, and more particularly the New Testament; that from thence he may form a true notion of this holy religion, and so be an able minister of it: this man, and only this man, so moved, and so qualified, can in truth, and with a good conscience, answer, that he trusts he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost: and every one that ventures on the saying it without this, is a sacrilegious profaner of the name of God, and of his Holy Spirit. He breaks in upon the church, not to feed it, but to rob it; and it is certain that he who begins with a lie, may be sent by the father of lies; but he cannot be thought to enter in by the door, who prevaricates in the first word that he says, in order to his admittance."

I would gladly stop here, if I could only persuade myself that all those who have thus testified before God and his church, would seriously consider their obligations, and immediately set about discharging them in the way required. But as this is not to be expected from those who make no conscience of that which they have uttered before God; it is right that the people should be informed, for the clearing of the church,—under

what sacred obligations she has laid their ministers to attend personally to their spiritual welfare.

In the charge that is given before the solemn act of ordination, "They are required to have always printed in their remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to their charge: the church and congregation whom they must serve, is his spouse and body. Then the greatness of the fault of their negligence, and the horrible punishment that will follow upon it, are set before them, in case the church, or any member of it, take any hurt or hindrance by reason of it. They are charged never to cease their labour, care, and diligence, till they have done all that lieth in them, according to their bounden duty, towards all such as *are*, or *shall* be committed to their care, to bring them to a ripeness and perfection of age in Christ. They are again urged to consider with what care and study they ought to apply themselves to this; to pray earnestly for God's Holy Spirit, and to be studious in reading and learning of the Scriptures; and to forsake and set aside, as much as they may, all worldly cares and studies. It is hoped that they have clearly determined, by God's grace, to give themselves wholly to this vocation; and as much as lieth in them, apply themselves wholly to this one thing, and to draw all their cares and studies this way, and to this end; and that by their daily reading and weighing the Scriptures, they will

study to wax riper and stronger in their ministry." "What greater force or energy," says Burnet, could be put in words, than is in these? Or where could any be found that are more weighty and more express, to shew the entire dedication of the whole man, of his time and labours, and the separating himself from all other cares, to follow this one thing, with all possible application and zeal? There is nothing in any office, ancient or modern, that I ever saw, which is of this force, so serious and so solemn; and it plainly implies not only the sense of the church upon this whole matter, but likewise their design who framed it, to oblige priests, notwithstanding any relaxation that the law of the land still favoured, by the firmest and sacredest bonds possible, to attend upon their flocks, and to do their duties to them."

But to put this matter beyond all possible doubt, let us consider the promises they make before God and his church, in relation to their flocks, even to such as are or shall be committed to their charge.

They all promise, in the most solemn manner, "That by the help of the Lord, they will give their faithful diligence always to minister the doctrines and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this realm hath secured the same according to the commandments of God: so that they teach

the people committed to their care; and charge with all diligence to keep and observe the same."

Can any thing be more clearly and plainly binding to constant and personal labour than this? Again, every one promises, in the most solemn manner, "That he will, by the help of God, be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word, and to use both public and private admonitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole within his care, as need shall require, and as occasion shall be given." This as plainly binds to personal and constant labour and watchfulness among their flocks, as words can express.

Again—"They promise that they will be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh." And further, "That they will maintain, and set forward, as much as lieth in them, quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people, and especially among them that are or shall be committed to their charge." These are the vows and promises that priests make before they can be ordained. And to complete the stipulation, the Bishop concludes it with a prayer to God, "who has given them the will to do all those things; to give them also strength and power to perform the same; that it

accomplish his work that he hath begun in them, until the time that he shall come, at the latter day, to judge the quick and the dead."

"Upon the whole matter then," says Burnet, "either this is all a piece of gross and impudent pageantry, dressed up in grave and lofty expressions, to strike upon the weaker part of mankind, and to furnish the rest with matter for their profane and impious scorn; or it must be confessed that priests come under the most formal and express engagements to constant and diligent labour (among their own flock) that can possibly be contrived or set forth in words. It is upon this, that they are ordained; so their ordination being the consummation of this compact, it must be acknowledged, that according to the nature of all mutual compacts, a total failure on the one side does also dissolve all the obligations that lay on the other; and therefore those who do not perform their part, that do not reside and labour; they do also, in the sight of God, forfeit all the authority and privileges that do follow their orders; as much as a Christian at large, that does not perform his baptismal vow, forfeits the right and benefits of his baptism in the sight of God. Times there have been, when words were thought to have and to convey some meaning; and vows and engagements were considered such solemn things, as that those who used and made them, felt themselv and care,

to acquit themselves properly, and to render according to the vows they had made. But when we consider in how many instances there is no such regard and attention; and that those who make them are the first to break them, and to live in the constant and strangest violation of them, where God, the church, and the souls of men are concerned; we must naturally conclude, either that we do not live in those times, or that the founders of the church meant the very opposite to that which their words and language so evidently appear to convey. But was there no true meaning in the solemn language they used? or did they expect nothing when they exacted the most solemn promises and vows? God being my helper, I do most solemnly believe that they meant what they said, and that they expected what they demanded by promises and vows, made at the sacred altar of the Lord. If this be right, then many in their practice must be strangely wrong. And shall not God reckon with those, who, pretending a motive they never had, and making vows and promises they never intended to fulfil, have thrust themselves into the fold of Christ, not to feed his sheep, but to enrich themselves by the spoils of the church? Yes, fearful indeed! must be their account, at the last great day, who, living by the altar they hardly ever serve, and the Gospel they never preach, leave their flocks in the hand of strangers, whose

own the sheep are not; constantly exposed to the ravages of the enemy, and thousands perish for ever in their sins. For conduct and consequences like these, whoever is to blame, the church certainly is not. Impossible indeed it is, to prevent entirely the intrusion of such daring, wicked, and unworthy men. But when the design, order, and regulations of the church are departed from, their entrance is facilitated; and I will leave others to state, where rests a very considerable portion of the blame. Let the heads of the church consider this, and return in every instance to the directions of her founders. Till this takes place, they can never be acquitted of tampering with her interests: and so long as they suffer it, they betray their awful trust, and render themselves responsible for all the mischief that may follow.

SECTION II.

Next to securing a ministry worthy the best of times, the founders of the church considered it of the greatest importance for her peace and order, and the happiness of the people, that they should all entertain and inculcate sound doctrine, and, as far as possible, be of one mind respecting those great and leading truths of Christianity, on the right understanding and faithful reception of which, depend entirely the salvation of fallen men.

To secure this, they carefully drew up the thirty-nine articles. In these articles is comprised

from Scripture, a summary of all the essential doctrines of Christianity. To these doctrines every minister is required to subscribe, *ex animo*. He is not to understand them in any other way, or sense, than in the plain, literal, and grammatical one, which the words and language used were designed to convey. Nor is he to preach or inculcate any thing contrary thereto, or which cannot be proved from them in connexion with the word of God.

If I have any just conception what doctrines a Christian minister should constantly teach, I should conceive that those which the fathers of the church arranged are the best, and come nearest to that which the Scriptures enjoin, and the church enforced in the best and purest times. But although they had a foresight, in such a work, which few but themselves have manifested; yet, strange to say, a departure from almost every thing they intended, has either more or less constantly prevailed. Times there have been, when it was rare indeed, not to hear from the pulpit, and not to read from the press, the strongest contradictions of all those sound, leading, and scriptural doctrines, which the Articles and Homilies inculcate, and the reading-desk conveys. The consequence was, that nearly the whole nation, on the main points of Christianity, were in total ignorance of all it most concerned them to believe and know, so that almost all their religion consisted in their attention to outward forms.

In this state were matters at the time of the appearance of the Wesleys, the Whitfields, and some few other names in the church, worthy to be recorded to the end of time. Those holy, able, and truly-devoted men, seeing the evil in question, sounded the alarm, and called both ministers and people to consider from whence they had fallen. In the spirit of Jeremiah, they proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." But how was this met by the Bishops and clergy of the day? Were they willing to hearken, to inquire, to see, and to return to the good old way, and to co-operate with them in the great and holy work of cleansing the sanctuary, and in repairing its breaches? The very opposite was the case. They said, in effect, with the Jews, "We will not hearken; we will not enquire; we will not return to the old paths, neither will we walk therein." They closed their pulpits against them; spurned them; raised the most impious outcry against them; and manifested a spirit which, had it not been restrained by just and equitable laws, made in former and better times, would have gladly chained them to the stake, and destroyed their zeal for God in the martyr's fire. The consequence was that they drove them and their adherents away; and we see in their descendants, and in others, who from the same

quarter have joined their ranks; a rival party, which, in point of the number of devoted worshippers, may, perhaps, more than equal the religious establishment of the land.

Had the rulers of the church been as wise and politic as the Pope, they would instantly have taken advantage of the talents, piety, and zeal of these great and worthy men; enlisted them in the best of causes which the human mind can conceive, and turned the whole for the advancement of true religion; for raising the church from her decayed and fallen state; and making her reflect again something of her pristine glory. It was in their power to have done this. These men whom they hated, persecuted, and opposed, were from principle, conviction, and education, sincerely attached to the established church. It was with the greatest reluctance that they adopted any measures inconsistent with her union and order, till they were forced, by being absolutely shut out from exercising their ministry in the church that they loved, and which they had sincerely devoted themselves to serve. But their opposers were blind! they were worse than blind! nay, I will go further, I will challenge the contrary to be proved, whether in any one instance, for more than a hundred years, the rulers of the church, or even the state, have ever adopted any measure for her good, which was not forced upon them by the rapid and formidable advances of her dissenting rivals, and then, perhaps, too late.

But with regard to the doctrines inculcated by this little band of able and devoted worthies, what one was there which is considered essential which they did not find in, and prove to the shame of their opponents, from the Articles, the Homilies, and the Liturgy of the Established Church? If their sermons and controversial writings be read with an unprejudiced mind, it will be found, as has just been stated, that they exactly correspond with those accredited documents. Nay, it will be found, next to Scripture, that their best and strongest weapons against their opponents in the Church, were drawn from her armoury. Yes, she supplied them with all their best and pointed arrows; and need it be asked to whom the victory belonged?

I am aware that this is not the opinion of some; and I am equally aware, that there are at this present moment, two parties within the church, who maintain and inculcate doctrines, on many important and essential points, the very opposite to each other. And it is clear, that either one or the other of these parties, must be in the wrong. They cannot both be in the right: and where doctors so widely differ, the question is, who shall decide? I pretend not to any popish infallibility; nor do I think that the case requires or admits the interference of any foreign judge. The church herself is, and ought to be, both her own interpreter and judge. She has clearly defined, in

her own accredited documents, what is her meaning, and how she is to be understood, on all the essential points, both of doctrine and duty; and it is certain that that party, which ever it may be, is the most likely to be in the right, which in doctrine, spirit, and practice, the most strictly, closely, literally, and affectionately conforms and adheres to her doctrines, as contained in her articles, explained and inculcated in her homilies, and so interwoven with her devotional forms, as that the spirit of them is breathed by her attached and devoted worshippers, in her incomparable liturgy. This, I suppose, is the correct way of arriving at the true opinion on this important matter. Important, indeed it is; because being as nearly divided in number, as they are opposed in doctrine, the heretical notions of the one must not only be extremely dangerous to the souls of men, but also to the stability and safety of the religious establishment of the land. A large proportion of the whole population of the kingdom, have already left the church, and joined the standard of dissent. Reasons, they state, they have, for this alarming defection; and the chief is, that they cannot hear from the clergy of the church, that is from one of the parties in question, those great doctrines of christianity, which are embodied in her articles, explained in her homilies, and comprised in her creed. Direct and collateral evidence then, being in favour of

the opinion above stated, it will be found both in fact, and in the opinion of all thoughtful, intelligent, and impartial judges, that the party, called (by some soberly, and by others contemptuously) the evangelical party, are alone the true churchmen, having the truth on their side: and that to the other belong the consequences of such a great departure from her pale. In making this statement, I am aware of the clamour that in many places, and from many persons, when seen, it will instantly excite. But if true, I see no reason why it should not be stated. If it be false, let it then be so proved and confuted; but it never can by any of those who do not hold, as the church does, those important doctrines contained in her 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th Articles. It was the departure from the sound doctrines contained in these articles, and some others discussed and held in the homilies, that gave occasion in the last century for the separations from the church which then took place. Where this departure therefore still exists, and is taught, it has exactly the same tendency: and those ministers may see it, if they will, in their own churches and parishes, in the scantiness of their congregations, and in the departure of all those who think seriously about religion and their souls.

Were I called upon to point out the amazing difference that exists between the doctrines held and inculcated by these differing parties, I

would not shrink from the task. But this has already been done by other and abler hands, and by no one more successfully and pointedly, than by the Rev. JOHN OVERTON, in his work entitled, "The True Churchman Ascertained." To this work, therefore, I shall refer all those who are interested in the important subject; and if I mistake not, it will be found so decisive on the question, as to be, as Bishop Horsley stated, unanswered, and unanswerable. This, to some, may appear a strange assertion, considering the noise and contention it excited at the time. But what did it all amount to, just to this:—being unable to confute and get rid of his pointed and close appeals to the articles, homilies, liturgy, and other accredited documents of the church and her fathers, they dressed up a figment of their own invention, which they imputed to him; although no more resembling the truth than the wind-mill antagonist of Don Quixote did a real knight: they brought, as he did, all their powers into the contest, but with as little success; for no man was convinced by their arguments who had the courage to use his own judgment in subjection to the word of God. The truth is, that this work did at the time, far more good even to its enemies themselves, than they are willing either to think or to own. It so exposed the glaring inconsistency of their statements with the Scriptures themselves, as well as the articles and homilies

of the church, that they were obliged to use, in their public discourses at least, a more decorous phraseology, which has been gradually improving from thence to this present time. The very designation by which they were known, and by which they recognized each other, has also partaken of a more chastened form. Hence, dropping the lofty and exclusive title of rational divines, they have now adopted that of 'the orthodox clergy;' and though their orthodoxy has still mixed with it much of the old spirit and leaven, it is evident that their general style and language are of a more decorous kind.

To be able to state an improvement even of this description, though small, is matter of congratulation to those who love the church, and have her real interests at heart. But when it is considered that things, and not words, are the points at issue,—that the sound and essential doctrines of Christianity are concerned, more than the manner of stating them,—it will be found a grave question to be resolved, whether there has been any real change of views, feelings, and sentiments on those leading points of our holy religion, in the right understanding, cordial belief, and influential reception of which, depends the Christian's state and character here, and his everlasting happiness in the world to come.

That men of sound religious views, correct conduct, active zeal, and fervent piety, are rapidly

on the increase, is not to be disputed. This, while it is matter of much rejoicing to the real friends of Christ and his Church, is no small cause of alarm to the opposite party. They are therefore constantly on the alert, to thwart their views, and to arrest their progress. If they would confine themselves to legitimate measures to effect their design, none would complain. But while bishops can mistake, and clergymen can deliberately urge and goad them on by the most direct and wicked slanders, to use all the influence with which their high stations invest them, all the learning with which they are endowed, all the reasoning and eloquence of which they are masters, and all the power they can claim, to crush them; or if this cannot be done, to take care, by every measure they can possibly devise, to prevent "the creeping in unawares" into the church, of another individual of such a noxious and dangerous tribe:—I say, while this can be done in the face of day, and against the evidence of facts constantly staring them in the face; and while reviewers, Christian Remembrancers, and caterers for Gentleman's Magazines, can approve of such conduct, and call on men of wealth and influence to lend their helping hand, to join in the impious outcry against them, and to put them down, they cannot but see and deplore the spirit that is still abroad, and actuating their enemies; while at the same time they

may set at defiance, in the name of the Lord, all the weapons that are formed against them.

And what is the object of all this clamour? It is to render them odious in the sight of those who are considered the influential part of the nation. And what are the measures they adopt? They state, and reiterate their statement against the evidence of the most stubborn facts, that nearly all the private and public depravity of the land are owing in great measure, if not altogether, to the doctrines and labours of the evangelical preachers. Wearisome, indeed, it is, to hear a twice-told tale; but more than doubly so it is to confute falsehoods which have been a thousand times confuted. They know the statement to be false. They know also that the doctrines which these ministers teach, their lives, and the lives of their numerous and attached followers, are as opposite to the consequences they impute to them as light is to darkness. Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil! Their gross falsehood confutes itself, and nothing more is needed than an appeal to it to put such calumniators to shame. But whence do they pretend to derive the ground of such a charge? From the inculcation of that great and leading doctrine of Christianity,—justification by faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ; that doctrine, says Luther, on which the standing or falling of the church dependeth. The founders of our Church clearly

thought that no such wicked consequence would follow the firm belief, and constant preaching of it. They say in the 11th Article—"We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings: wherefore, that we are justified by *faith only; is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort,* as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification." If the oppugners, then, of the evangelical clergy, be themselves priests, in imputing consequences so very wicked to that doctrine which the founders of the church declared to be most wholesome, they have brought themselves into a strange dilemma, out of which, with a clear conscience, I wish them a good deliverance. That it was the same doctrine which St. Paul preached, is beyond dispute; not only because he used and inculcated it in the same terms and in the same way, but because the very same objections were brought against him, by the very same class of persons in his day. This doctrine they called a lie.—He, the truth of God, and which abounded to his glory—Not content with this, he tells us that they slanderously reported, and some even affirmed that he said to his hearers—"Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation," says he, "is just?" If any thing can silence such men, or awe them into a consideration of that which they do not understand,

and have sworn, that they do, *ex animo*, believe and profess, it must be this fearful declaration from the mouth of an inspired apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. Calumniate, affirm, or slanderously report as they like, they can never overthrow the truth of God.—Persisting in this hateful conduct, their destruction is inevitable; and, says the apostle, "Their damnation is just." What is meant by this awful declaration of St. Paul, I shall leave those to decide, who, from their conduct are more immediately concerned. Informed, however, they shall be, that it is neither by insulting the evangelical clergy, nor by calumniating them, that their progress can be impeded; or that either they or their numerous followers will be brought to forsake those doctrines, which from Scripture, reason, and conviction of the highest kind, they have most sincerely and truly embraced. Such writers and speakers may confirm those persons in their opinion, who already hate and despise this formidable body of truly devoted men; and by this be aiding to make sure and accelerate their everlasting ruin; but who, except the arch-enemy himself, would, at the day of judgment, be envious to have effected such a dreadful work as this? The truth is, it is the superior holiness, which the evangelical party contend for, that their opposers so thoroughly hate. They have sense enough to see, that if the evangelical

doctrine be true, they are themselves in a most deplorable state. Not, therefore, wishing to be constantly troubled with apprehensions of this description, they shut their eyes against the truth, and would, I fear, be glad to get rid of them, without regarding very nicely the way.

It may puzzle some persons, and it is undoubtedly a puzzling question to resolve, how it is that the most zealous, active, laborious, faithful, and devoted ministers of the church, should be so constantly held up to the public contempt;—often frowned upon by the bishops,—sometimes by them thwarted in their endeavours to advance the highest interests of their people;—and even where this is not openly done, but a more civil and sometimes commendatory testimony is given them, yet are singled out as persons on whom they either will not or dare not shew any portion of their favour; while the very opposite characters are held in admiration, or at least suffered to be quiet, and have heaped upon them the highest favours which the state and the church have to bestow. Perhaps the following observations may throw some light on this mysterious matter.

The majority of those who profess themselves of the national church,—like other people following the religion of their fathers, because they have been born and bred up in it, think it right; and therefore never trouble their heads

about enquiring any further respecting the principles it contains. Their names are found in the parish register,—some of them regularly attend the church,—many do not; yet even some of these send occasionally their wives, children, and servants; and so long as they are peaceable and tolerably conform to the laws of the land for the purposes of the state, this is generally considered sufficient: and it is to be feared, that this is the case with many both of the bishops and clergy, as it certainly is with most of the people. Such a religious profession, however, it is evident produces very little effect upon their lives; and their moral conduct, so far as it exists, depends upon the circumstances in which they are placed, and the temper and character of the times, and not upon any *principles*, *moral* or *religious*. Flagrant crimes, considering the population of the country, are rarely committed, because public opinion, as well as the law, is against them: on this account, therefore, it is, that every atrocious offence is regarded, except by the person committing it, as something shocking and unnatural. But that, with respect to those vices which bring with them no immediate, palpable, or apparent evil, the majority feel themselves under very little restraint, is a fact of which every street in every town, and every lane in every village in the kingdom, furnishes daily and nightly proofs. In this country, therefore, where public opinion and

manners supply, generally speaking, the only rule of life; and religious principle is very little thought of in appointments of every kind; it is natural to suppose, (excellent as the church establishment is) that many of those who destine their sons for the sacred office of the ministry, are regulated in their conduct, not by what the church demands, and the word of God enjoins, but by the lax maxims and the selfish principles, which are the general regulators of the conduct of mankind. I am aware of the tender ground on which I am about to tread: but, says the writer from whom the substance of the above is taken, and he is a high churchman too:—"There was a time when the disposition of youth, and their moral and intellectual character were considered, before they were destined to the church. In many instances this is still the case;—it is hoped in most,—but that in many instances it is otherwise, must be notorious to any person, who looks back upon his own contemporaries at the university, and recollects those among them who were destined to the altar." These, then, bringing with them under their sacred character no higher principles and maxims for their guidance, than were before described, their whole deportment in religious matters will accord with the taste and habits of the people; and there will be no desire either to disturb them in their slumbers, or to be disturbed by them with any

troublesome enquiries about the state and care of their souls. So long as this state of things exists, all are satisfied. But should it either unfortunately or fortunately happen, that the adjoining parish in a few years is put into the hands of one of those zealous and truly devoted men, who, entering into the service of the church in the spirit, and from the motives she demands, consider not their life dear to them so that they may fulfil the ministry intrusted to them,—and should the report of the preaching and labours of this new-comer, excite his parishioners to hear for themselves, and they steal away one after another till he finds himself nearly deserted; all is over at once,—cunning and contrivance scrape up some malignant report;—the esquire joins the priests—away fly letters to the bishop,—help is instantly craved,—and this is the reason—"For they that turn the world upside down, are come hither also."

This, I take it, when considered in connection with that hateful principle of our fallen nature, which St. Paul states to be enmity against God, will throw some light on the puzzling matter before stated, as well as the difference that exists between the two parties which so unhappily divide the church. The one is for letting things remain just as nature dictates, and the lax habits and notions of a careless world will consent to allow: the other insists on a radical change both of the

heart, principles, character, and habits. They can make or allow no compromise in these important matters: they therefore constantly inculcate what the church enjoins, that every man, woman, and child, are bound by the most solemn engagements "To renounce the devil, and all his works; the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. And to believe all the articles of the Christian faith; and keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life." They believe that repentance towards God; faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ; and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; are comprised in the above epitome of Christian obligation and duty. They believe that no man is in a safe state, who is not living in the constant exercise of these. This, therefore, being the substance of all their preaching, and their object, to promote the glory of God and the salvation of men; and as a dispensation to this effect is committed to them from the highest authority, they cannot but feel the immense responsibility which attaches to them, and this it is that makes them so thoughtful, zealous, and active. Here then is the offence. But how does this accord with the declaration of their enemies? One of them, and who is distinguished for nothing so much, (one or two instances excepted,) as the breach of that commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not

bear false witness against thy neighbour," has had the hardihood to direct us to that rule left by the Saviour for the direction of the church in all ages respecting the character of a good or a bad member: it is this—"Every tree is known by its fruits! and tried by this rule," says he, "there will appear to be little doubt, that evangelical preaching is a spurious plant, corrupt in root, branch, and product." I should like to know how he makes it out that the constant preaching and insisting upon repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, is a spurious plant, corrupt in root, branch, and product? It appears to me, that this sort of preaching, if the preachers themselves really believe the doctrines they inculcate, must be the very opposite, both in root, branch, and product. But let us try these preachers, by his own rule, and the character he has given them. "With regard to these preachers themselves," he says, "no man can be more inclined than I am to give them full credit for conscientious motives, warm piety, pure morality, and a zealous attention to the duties of the pastoral office,—nay,—I will go further, and add,—for voluntary sacrifice, in many instances, of health, and not unfrequently of life itself, to their ministerial labours; so that if every cause made a martyr, many of them might justly claim the honour and rewards of such self-devoted

characters." "Every tree is known by its fruit," says Jesus Christ. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." This being the case, I should like to know from whence are produced, according to their own shewing, the splendid fruits which are so abundantly manifested in the spirit, lives, and labours of these truly holy and devoted men. From a corrupt tree they cannot spring: but from a good tree they may. And I really think every man of common sense, must see, or think at least, that they bear upon them something of that character which the founders of the church designed all her ministers, and even her bishops to bear. But oh! say they, to all this, we make no objection. We give them full credit in this respect for all they can demand. It is the doctrine they teach, against which we are opposed. And why? Because "Its growth is so rapid, and its popularity so great among the people, that it really threatens to overwhelm us, and all our schemes to arrest its progress end in a dark and endless oblivion." Our case, therefore, is almost desperate, and this is the reason we call so earnestly for the bishops to put them down. But they cannot attend to your request. Why not? Because the bishop of Winchester says in his charge,—"These are they in whom the strength of the English church consists; men in whose humble and laborious lives, we may see

the spirit of primitive teachers of the Gospel, ready to spend and be spent in the service of their master; and, in the true sense of their ordination vows, not grudging "to seek Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever." This being the case, your request must be hopeless; and, therefore, after such a refusal, you would save some little portion of your credit, if you would never trouble their lordships again.

After what has been said, what am I to think, or to say of those truly devoted men? Am I to join in the senseless outcry against them? Or am I to esteem their success in the sacred cause in which they are engaged, and the sense and feeling of their numerous followers, who love their doctrine, and adore their Lord, as no way better than that of the silversmith and his adherents, whose craft being in danger through the rapid spread of the apostle's doctrine,—"asserted the divinity of Diana: the feeling ran through the city of Ephesus with the speed of lightning; and all the inhabitants quickly joined in the senseless outcry, great is Diana of the Ephesians!" For a clergyman of the church of England to estimate the success of his devoted brethren's labours, in this degrading light, and for others of the same cloth to clap their hands in token of their approbation, is such a gross outrage on common sense

and decency, that every churchman in the land ought indignantly to cry, *shame!* Whatever others may be, I for one shall never be ashamed to give these despised and hated men the right hand of fellowship. No, I wish them God speed in the name of the Lord; and I fervently pray that God may so increase their number, and bless their labours, that every church in the land may have one of them for its minister; and that the people may so be taught by them, that they may understand, receive, believe, and obey the truth in the love thereof, and so follow Christ, that they may finally reach heaven. This being the case, the very worst wish I wish their clerical enemies, and I do sincerely wish it from the bottom of my heart, is, that they may all very soon become of the number; join heart and soul with them in their high and holy labours; and so may finally share in the happiness of those to whom it will be said—"Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." To this charitable wish respecting them, it would give me the most unfeigned pleasure to hear them say, Amen. It is not because I fear them, that I am induced to pray on their behalf:—no; it is because I pity them, on account of the disgrace they bring upon themselves, and the church they profess to belong to. And surely, for men who will not see, and refuse to understand, it is better to pray, than contend with them. In this man-

ner, therefore, I shall conclude this article,— "That it may please thee, O Lord, to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts."

SECTION III.

NEXT to securing a ministry worthy the best and holiest times, and providing for their soundness in the faith, and their unanimity in understanding and inculcating the same saving and holy doctrines, the founders of the church devised their measures in such a way, that as every parish had its church, so every church should have its minister constantly living and residing among the people, giving to them his sole and undivided labour; and this in strict conformity to all their regulations respecting both the nature and quantum of the duties to be performed.

If any thing were wanting to enhance the praise of these great and worthy men, it is abundantly afforded in the pious care which they took for the religious wants of the people; so far, indeed, did they extend it, that they provided for the wants of every day. This shewed not only their high sense of the Christian character and state; but how much they considered it needful to maintain in active vigour the life and power of religion in the soul. But they were men who knew its worth, and felt its power.

That, therefore, which was needful for themselves, they conscientiously provided for others; and had all their regulations been strictly attended to in the fear of God, we should never have been called to witness and deplore, the low state of that effective and saving piety, which it was their chief object to nourish and promote.

This, I take it, was the exciting cause of the above provision. It is impossible to draw any other conclusion than this, from their known and declared regulation respecting the daily and constant maintenance of the public worship of Almighty God. But to whatever cause or causes it is to be ascribed, it will be found, on the slightest investigation, that a different spirit has long been manifested; and that great deviations from their declared design and regulations, have long and greatly prevailed. The consequences we know: and if we felt them as we ought, we should attend to him who proclaimed--" Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls." If we were willing to come to the investigation of this matter, in the fear of Him who demanded such a conduct of Israel of old, it would remove much of the difficulty that would otherwise attend it, and disarm the prejudice excited by such a call. I am aware of the force of custom, and how very little in this way the

disposition and the temper of the times will bear. This being the case, that which is impracticable, shall be left as it is; it being the wiser course to insist upon that which we are able to perform.

That the subject may be clearly viewed, it must be placed fairly and fully before us. By adopting this method, the opportunity is afforded for the minutest investigation; and we shall see the propriety of returning to that duty from which we have so long and so greatly departed. Let us, then, put the following questions, and consider the answers:

1. Has every parish in the kingdom the sole and undivided labour of its minister; and is this labour in strict conformity to the regulations of the church, both as to the nature and quantum of the duties to be performed?
2. Has every parish in the kingdom, its constantly resident incumbent?
3. Has every incumbent in the kingdom, no more than one benefice with the cure of souls?

To all these very important questions, a negative answer must be returned: and this being the case, it is clear that great deviations from the original designs and regulations of the founders of the church have taken place. These deviations being attended with very great and serious inconvenience to the people, it must follow, as a consequence, that in the same proportion as they

prevail, they not only render the church inefficient for the purpose intended, but are the cause of a very considerable portion of that departure from her pale, which is every where witnessed throughout the land.

To what extent, then, deviations exist, it is impossible for me exactly to state; some light however has been thrown on the subject by the bishop of Winchester, in his late charge at Llandaff. Were we to assume, then, the state of that diocese as a tolerably fair specimen of the whole, we might, by examining in detail the information afforded by his lordship, come somewhat near the truth, how matters stand in every diocese in the kingdom; and consequently the inconveniency which the population of the country are put to, on this account.

Let us then consider the first question proposed.

Has every parish in the kingdom, the sole and undivided labour of its minister; and is this labour in strict conformity to the regulations of the church, both as to the nature and quantum of the duties to be performed?

To understand this question correctly, it will be necessary to observe, that though some of the incumbents may not divide their labour by taking the half-duty of any other church, yet not having the service twice a day in their own, as the founders of the church designed, and the law

directs, they do not afford the labour required. By this also it will be seen, that the enquiry extends only to the public services of the church.

According to the bishop's statement on this head, it appears that of two hundred and thirty-four parishes, into which his diocese is divided, only twenty-six incumbents afforded to their parishioners their sole and undivided labours; consequently two hundred and eight parishes have religious service only once on the Lord's day. Taking this, therefore, for our guide, we shall find that the inhabitants of something more than seven-eighths of the parishes throughout the kingdom have no more than one weekly opportunity afforded, of assembling together in the church for religious instruction and worship, consequently, more than seven-eighths of the parochial clergy of the establishment do not afford to their parishioners, those religious benefits which the constitution of the church, their own solemn engagements, and the law of the realm demand. What a fearful dereliction! And what awful reflections is it calculated to excite! The people, seeing and knowing this sad neglect of their highest and most important interests, must think lightly of their legal instructors. In what view also, must they regard the scanty instructions they afford? And then if we add to this, the deficiency both of the matter and the manner in which these instructions are given, we shall

not wonder that many have left the establishment and joined the ranks of dissent,—but rather that the great bulk have not adopted the same course of conduct, and left, as in many instances, the parish minister to preach to empty pews, and mouldy walls. One reason why this is not the case, is this; there is still in the minds of a considerable portion of the people, an attachment to the religious establishment of the land;—they wish to bring up their children after the religious order of the realm: they therefore cling to it, though labouring under all the disadvantages described, in hope that a change for the better will eventually occur. Let the rulers of the church, then, do their duty as men of God; and if they wish to retain their rank, preserve the church, and regain the confidence of the people, let them take advantage of that which remains, and see that they have those religious means afforded, which their wants require, and the law demands. Time was, when a very slight portion of, and attention to religious duties, was considered sufficient by the bulk of mankind. This time, with a considerable portion of the people, is happily gone by: and one great reason why the church is so rapidly on the decline, is, that she has made no effort to meet their wants, at all proportionate to the demands of the age. In this respect she has stood stationary, while every other party is advancing at full stretch. The

people do not love to have it so. Deprived, therefore, of that supply which she ought to afford, they have sought it in other channels where it more copiously flows. There they meet with a constant readiness to supply their demands, and often to exceed them. This persuades them that there their best interests are felt at heart; and where this is not perceived, nothing can convince them that there is any real regard for the salvation of their souls.

I am aware that circumstances exist, if the laws of the church be interpreted rightly, to prevent the clergy from exercising their ministry to the most advantage; and from extending their labours to the aged and infirm, who may live at such a distance from the parish church as to preclude their attendance on the public worship of Almighty God. Many well disposed and laborious ministers have attempted to remedy this evil, by endeavouring to collect together in a private house, during the week, persons of this description, living in the distant hamlets of their parishes, for the purpose of affording them some means of religious instruction and worship. This has been considered by many of the bishops as prohibited by the law, and they have been obliged to desist. By this interpretation of the law, the established clergy of the land are so completely fettered, that however urgent the case, they cannot move; while the dissenters have full liberty to adopt any

means they please, and to hold meetings of this or any other description, in every house in their parishes, with consent of the owners. I certainly am no friend to any thing wild, foolish, extravagant or inconsistent with the order and discipline of the church: but this, I conceive, is a state of things that ought not to exist; nor am I satisfied that the law is rightly interpreted in this respect. The Canon says, "No minister shall preach or administer the holy communion, in any private house, *except it be in times of necessity; when any, being either so impotent that he cannot go to church,* or very dangerously sick, are desirous to be partakers of the holy sacrament." For the sick, desiring to receive the sacrament, the church has provided a distinct service, in which there is no direction for the minister to preach; therefore, I take it, that as far as preaching goes, the exception in the canon is not in favour of them. But there is another class which comes under the term impotent, which, though not sick, yet either through age, infirmity, or distance, cannot go to church. In their favour, the exception in the canon may be fairly taken; and I should conceive the minister would not be transgressing the bounds either of the law or his duty, if he should collect and preach to them in a private house.

Whether this be the exact meaning of the law, I am not lawyer enough to decide. It is, however, in my mind, more correct than that which

entirely excludes preaching in private houses, while the law itself does make an exception. The necessity of the case, in many instances, demands at least the most favourable construction; and the bishops, I really think, would be more in character if they were employed in rebuking and chastising some of their idle, drunken, and worthless clergy, than in restraining the zealous efforts of the well-disposed and active to promote the real benefit of their people's souls. Their lordships, I conceive, are bound both by the law of the land and by their sacred office, to insist on and see that the clergy afford to their people that service which the church requires, and the law demands. If they neglect it, they clearly betray their sacred trust, and become responsible for all the mischief that follows.

I know their reasons for declining this; and the more than weak excuse that is urged against the general adoption of the plan: but surely more than seven-eighths of the incumbency of the whole kingdom can never be so poor, as not to afford a sufficient remuneration for discharging the duties which the law demands. I am disposed to give full credit to that benevolence which, it is thought by some, is the principal motive, which influences their lordships' minds. But is not this licence for neglect carried beyond all just and reasonable bounds? I know there are some parishes, churches, and perpetual

curacies, so poor, that they do not afford that remuneration necessary for the service required. For these the law has wisely provided; and it would be an over-stretch of power to compel in such a case. But are these the only instances in which their lordships neglect or decline to enforce the duty required? Every person knows it is not. The richest livings have commonly the smallest service performed. The incumbents of these are generally pluralists, and non-residents beside. The scanty sum they allow to their curates, obliges them to seek for other aid; while, if they procure this by engaging a second church, some of these incumbents are so mean as to take advantage of the law, and reduce the miserable pittance they formerly gave, full thirty pounds a year. I appeal to your lordships whether this be fair, whether it be honest, I mean in the sight of God; and whether a line of procedure, which allows and sanctions it, and the neglect of the duty beside, will not be differently thought of at the judgment seat of Christ? I blame not a regard for and a leaning towards the clergy, where necessity requires it, and prudence and justice demand: but it ought to be remembered, that the people who support them have also their just and reasonable claims. For what is it that their tithes are paid, and their offerings bestowed? Is it not that their religious wants may be attended to, and that they may have the

benefit of all the means of grace which the constitution of the church has provided, and the law demands? I will not hesitate to say, that he who does not balance these claims fairly, is not fit to be a judge:—he prostitutes the power with which the law has invested him, and sacrifices the interests of the many, for the benefit of the few. But it will be said, that however just and reasonable it may be, that the people should have the full benefit of that which the church designed, it is impossible, from the poverty of the supply in many cases, to comply with their demands. That which it is impossible to grant, it would be more than foolish to demand. Such demands I make not; and though I am ignorant by what rule the judgments of the bishops are regulated in this matter, I will take the very highest point of that remuneration which the law allows to be a sufficient maintenance for the curate, as the regulated standard of that which the church and the wants of the people demand.

The highest sum which the law allows to a curate is one hundred and fifty pounds a year, with the additional benefit of the house. This, then, I will take as a sufficient remuneration for the discharge of the duties which the founders of the church designed. He, whose income from his benefice amounts to this, and neglects the duty which the founders of the church designed, breaks the stipulation by and for which it was

conferred; and therefore forfeits in the sight of God his right of claim to the benefit enjoined. But the law—it will be said. There is no one estimates more highly the benefit of the law than myself; and few will carry their subjection to it to a greater extent. But that which was designed to regulate the conduct of man with man, can never annul his obligations and his duty towards God. To this the law cannot reach, nor was it designed: it is therefore perverted, where it is thus construed; and no man can obey it in such a case, without violating both his duty and his conscience in the most shameful and awful way. This, to some, may appear strong language; but it is no stronger than the case demands. If Daniel had obeyed the law, which was projected to reach his life, he might have escaped the danger to which he was exposed: but Daniel had a higher authority that demanded his obedience, though in opposition to the law of his prince. To this authority he bowed, nor was he studious to conceal the fact: and God so honoured his regard, that by a miracle, he not only saved his life, but overruled the malignant purposes of his enemies, so as to bring upon their own heads the destruction they had prepared for him. This, perhaps, may be a subject that will repay the reflection its importance demands: I say not that there is any analogy to the matter in hand. The laws of the land prohibit no duty which we owe

to God; they merely sanction the omission, or rather merely prohibit from the infliction of penalties against this omission, enacted by former laws. The duty is still the same, notwithstanding the relaxation of the law; and it will be found a fearful thing at the last great day, if by taking advantage of this, we neglect the eternal interests of those committed to our care. If in the guidance of their conduct in this important matter, the bishops would weigh well this great consideration, they would come to a determination more consistent with their duty to God, and the millions of those over whose spiritual and eternal interests they are appointed to preside. In the appointment of stipends to secondary persons, they are clearly restricted by the law of the land: but whether the law of God allows of such secondary persons in the manner they are now employed, is another question, and I fear not easily, at least satisfactorily, to be resolved. This, however, I shall leave as it is, and return to that where there is no doubt. The bishops, then, are left by the law to their own judgment, whether they will or will not enforce the performance of morning and evening service on the Sunday, or any other service required by law. I will appeal, then, to their lordships' judgment, whether one religious service in the week is sufficient to keep alive in the minds of the people that spiritual state of mind, and that regard for their highest and

most important interests, which the word of God demands. But supposing this to be the case, and that the parishioners were all disposed to attend; are there not a considerable portion of them who, from necessity, are obliged to be absent from the service, by engagements at home, impossible to be avoided? these, therefore, must be utterly deprived of any opportunity of religious worship in the church, where there is only one service. So that tens of thousands through the land, have for many years together, no opportunity whatever for attending the religious instruction and worship of the established church. But how is this aggravated where there is only service once a fortnight or three weeks; and in some cases, only once a month? Shocking as these last instances may appear, they are not so rare as it may be generally supposed. Numbers of such cases might be easily named, and not so poor as to excuse such neglect. One of the best livings in York, whose church at least is not more than one hundred and fifty yards from its walls, though comprising a population of more, I believe, than five or six hundred persons, has to this very day service only once a fortnight. The question then is, upon the whole, are these persons to live and die without the means of grace; or must they resort to places of dissent to obtain that of which they are deprived in the national church?

I think there can be only one answer to this question; and who can blame them in a case of such great and infinite concern. From this quarter alone the meeting-house may be abundantly supplied. They urge this when spoken to as the cause of their dissent; and vast numbers, I believe, would never have thought of the measure, much less adopted it, had they not been utterly deprived of the means in the church. They become dissenters, not from principle, but necessity; unless they would live and die like heathens. Surely something must be done to remedy this great and crying evil, or we must take all the credit to ourselves of filling the meeting-house, and emptying the church. In this dilemma, as things exist, we are clearly placed. And shall we, with the remedy in our hands, sit still, and enjoy the disgrace? Others may do as they please, but never will I, God being my helper, so long as I have a head to think, a tongue to speak, or a hand to write.

But I have heard it stated that the bishops, though they have the power to enforce the afternoon service, yet cannot oblige the clergy to preach;—be it so, and what of that? Are the prayers and the reading of the Scriptures to be taken for nothing? But, supposing that any may entertain this opinion, and therefore not think it worth their while to attend,—can the bishops compel no instruction to be given? Yes,

they can compel that, which in my mind is of more importance than a sermon;—I mean the public catechising of the children and young people every Sunday throughout the year, according to the plan provided in our brief and comprehensive catechism. Those who have not practised this important branch of the Christian ministry, can have no conception of its great and just utility and worth; and of the interest it excites, both among the aged and the young. When properly performed, it far exceeds sermons, in usefulness. At sermons and prayers, men may sleep or wander; but when one is asked a question, he must be alive to it, and discover by his answer that he is. Sermons may pass off without exciting either interest or thought; but to be able to answer all the questions to be proposed, requires consideration on all the points of Christian doctrine and of duty. Ever since this practice has been given up as an efficient means of religious instruction, the church has been gradually on the decline. The rising generation, being left without any efficacious religious instruction, both at home and abroad, are prepared to throw off all those just restraints which kept their forefathers within bounds. Succeeding generations being left in ignorance of all they were most concerned to know, have improved upon the vices of their parents; and hence have ensued that profligacy and looseness of manners,—that independence of spirit, which

will not brook control,—and that disrespect for parents, magistrates, ministers, masters and superiors: which, without some great and remarkable change, must end in the total overthrow of the government and the established religion of the land.

Let our bishops consider this important matter with all the seriousness it demands: and if they desire to preserve their stations, and the church which they are appointed to govern and to serve, they will see the vast necessity of returning to the original designs and regulations of the church in the instance in question; and of insisting on the revival of that part of the ministerial duty, on which the right instruction and direction of the rising generation so materially depend.

Second Question stated and answered.

Has every parish in the kingdom its incumbent constantly living and residing amongst the people?

In considering this great question, it will be necessary, previous to its actual solution, to advert to some particulars on which is founded the necessity of a constant residence of the clergy, in their own peculiar jurisdiction.

"The ministry of things divine," says Hooker, "is a function, which as God did himself institute, so neither may men undertake the same, but by authority and power given them in lawful

manner. That God, which is no way deficient or wanting unto man in necessaries, and hath therefore given us the light of his heavenly truth, because without that inestimable benefit we must needs have wandered in darkness to our endless perdition and woe; hath in the like abundance of mercies ordained certain to attend upon the due execution of requisite parts and offices therein prescribed for the good of the whole world, which men thereunto assigned do hold their authority from him, whether they be such as himself immediately, or as the church in his name, investeth. They are, therefore, ministers of God, and being Christ's ambassadors, and his labourers, who should give them their commission, but He whose most inward affairs they manage? Is not God alone the Father of Spirits? Are not souls the purchase of Jesus Christ? What angel in heaven could have said to man, as our Lord did unto Peter and his brethren, "Feed my sheep? Preach? Baptize? Do this in remembrance of me? Whose sins ye retain, they are retained; and their offences in heaven pardoned, whose faults you shall on earth forgive?" What think we? Are these terrestrial sounds, or else are they voices uttered out of the clouds above? The power of the ministry of God translateth out of darkness into glory; it raiseth men from the earth, and bringeth God himself from heaven; by blessing visible elements, it maketh them invisible

grace; it giveth daily the Holy Ghost; it hath to dispose of that flesh which was given for the life of the world, and that blood which was poured out to redeem souls: when it poureth malediction upon the heads of the wicked, they perish; when it revoketh the same, they revive. O wretched blindness, if we admire not so great power; and still more wretched, if, invested with it, we consider it not aright, and do not live and labour among those whose eternal interests have been committed to our care!"

Lofty as this may sound in the estimation of some, it is no more than that with which the ministers of Christ are invested by their Lord, for the benefit of the world. One reason why it is not thus seen and admired is, because few comparatively either understand, or consider, the immense interests committed to their charge; and another, because, unhappily, they do not observe in most of those, who are invested with the priestly office, that care, labour, and anxiety which such immense and infinite interests so clearly and constantly demand. By the conduct of these, the sacred office is brought into much contempt, and millions are lost for ever and ever. But whatever may be the estimate of the one, or the fearful guilt of the other, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. That which he hath thought necessary for his own glory, and the salvation of a ruined world, must have been wisely devised,

and justly adapted to accomplish his great designs. Here there can be no lack: but this great and heavenly treasure, having been committed to earthen vessels, is sometimes so defaced by the contact, that we can scarcely recognize it as the gift and workmanship of God. One thing however is certain, that true religion, without the help of spiritual ministry, can neither plant itself, nor produce the fruits expected from it of its own accord.

"Those things," says Hooker, "which are of God, he hath by wonderful art and wisdom soldered, as it were, together, with the glue of mutual assistance, appointing the lowest to receive from the nearest to themselves, what the influence of the highest yieldeth. And therefore the church, being the most absolute of all his works, was in reason to be also ordered with like harmony, that what he worketh, might no less in grace than in nature be effected by hands and instruments duly subordinated unto the power of his own spirit. A thing both needful for the humility of man, which would not willingly be debtor to any but to himself; and of no small effect to nourish that divine love, which now maketh each embrace other, not as men, but as angels of God. Ministerial actions tending immediately unto God's honour, and man's happiness, are either as contemplation, which helpeth forward the principal work of the ministry, or else they are parts

of that principal work of administration itself, which work consisteth in doing the service of God's house, and in applying unto men the sovereign medicines of grace, to the end it might thereby appear, that we owe to the guides of our souls, even as much as our souls are worth, although the debt of our temporal blessings should be stricken off."

Taking this then as the appointment of God in the ministry of things divine, we see at once the absolute necessity that he who ministereth in holy things, should give his whole and personal attention to the service of God's house, and in applying unto those whom he is especially appointed to serve, the sovereign medicine of that grace which is indeed the life of their souls. He who acts otherwise betrays the great and infinite trust committed to his care, and exposes both himself and his charge, to the awful danger of endless and everlasting ruin. The founders of the church, entertaining this opinion,—an opinion, let it be observed, founded on the word and authority of God,—clearly saw the vast importance and necessity of a constantly resident ministry. Nothing short of this they ever once contemplated; nor can it be conceived how in any other way, either the designs of God, or the minister's own special and solemn engagements, can be accomplished in regard to those souls committed to his care. Ministers being shepherds,

whose flocks can be no time secure from danger; and watchmen, whom the enemy doth always besiege; their labours in the word and sacraments admit of no intermission. Their duty requireth instruction and conference with men, in private as well as in public. They are therefore the living oracles of God, to whom the people must be able always to resort for counsel in all their trials, temptations, afflictions, and difficulties: and as they are beside this commanded to be patterns of holiness, leaders, feeders, and superiors to their own peculiar charge, none of all these can they be, without constant residence and labour amongst them.

"Touching therefore the pains and industry," says Hooker, "wherewith men are in conscience bound to attend the work of their heavenly calling, even as much as in them lieth, bending thereunto their whole endeavour, without either fraud, sophistication, or guile; I see not what more effectual obligation or bond of duty there should be urged, than their own only vow and promise made unto God himself at the time of ordination. The work which they have undertaken, requireth both care and fear. Their sloth, that negligently perform it, maketh them subject to malediction. Besides, we also know that the fruit of our pains in this function, is life, both to ourselves and others: and do we yet need incitement to labour? Shall we stop our ears, both

against those conjuring exhortations which apostles, and against the fearful comminations which prophets, have uttered out of the mouth of God; the one for prevention, the other for reformation of our sluggishness in this behalf? St. Paul says, "Attend to yourselves and to all the flock whereof the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers; to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Again, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, which shall judge the quick and the dead at his coming, preach the word; be instant in season and out of season," &c. &c. "Should not the shepherds," says Ezekiel, "should they not feed the flocks; ye eat the fat, and ye clothe yourselves with the wool; but the weak ye have not strengthened, the sick ye have not cured, neither have ye bound up the broken, nor brought home again that which was driven away. Ye have not enquired after that which was lost; but with cruelty and rigour have ruled—Wherefore as I live, I will require," &c. &c. "Woe unto the pastors," says Jeremiah, "that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture; I will visit you for the wickedness of your works, saith the Lord; the remnant of my sheep I will gather together out of all countries, and will bring them again to their folds: they shall grow and increase, and I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them." God having

invested in the ministry of the church, with the accompanying aid of the Holy Spirit, the care of his own honour, and the salvation and happiness of man, both in this world and the next; the alarming considerations just stated clearly indicate, that as personal labour is necessary for the accomplishment of the divine designs, so the personal and constant residence of ministers amongst the people of their charge, cannot be safely dispensed with. This residence, the founders of the church laid all their measures to accomplish. It is true they foresaw, that by a worldly policy, their best intentions might all be frustrated by the intervention of the law: they therefore required of all those who should be made ministers, vows and promises at the sacred altar of the Lord, which, as they are demanded in the name of God and his church, have upon them the nature of the most solemn oaths, binding as far as any thing can bind, their personal and constant labour among those who are or ever shall be committed to their care. No law can set aside this: nor can the abrogation of that oath which at institution, the vicars, at least, were formerly obliged to take. Such a law may prevent the infliction of those civil penalties which were formerly denounced against non-residents; but it can never take away the obligations of those solemn vows, oaths, and engagements, entered into with God and his church. This

being the case, let us now proceed to the solution of that important question which stands at the head of these remarks.

Has every parish in the kingdom its incumbent constantly living and residing amongst the people? To this question, like the other, a negative answer must be returned. Let us, then, see how the matter stands from the information before us. The bishop of Winchester tells us, in his late charge at Llandaff, that out of two hundred and thirty-four incumbencies, into which the diocese is divided, only "ninety-seven parishes enjoy the advantage of clergy, incumbents and curates, actually resident." Taking the curates to amount to one half of the whole, which will be found I believe to be generally correct, then only about forty-eight of the two hundred and thirty-four incumbents are actually resident in their parishes.

Conceiving this to be a fair specimen of the state of every diocese in the kingdom, what an alarming reflection is it calculated to excite!! Nearly four-fifths of the parishes throughout the whole kingdom have no resident incumbent; consequently near four-fifths of the people are left, as it respects their paid and legal pastor, as sheep without a shepherd. They have no incumbent to watch over them, to feed them, or to care for their best and highest interests; none to whom they can resort for advice,

counsel, or succour, in all their trials, sorrows, temptations, and difficulties; none to instruct, to sooth, and comfort them, on the bed of affliction and death; and none to assist them in their preparation for a boundless and never-ending eternity. Their legal, paid, rightful, and most solemnly avowed instructors are fled. Some they never see or hear, for five—ten—fifteen—twenty and even thirty years together. Some, again, are born, brought up, marry, have families, live, and die, and enter into eternity, without ever once either seeing or hearing their legal teacher. I speak of numerous facts in all the above instances within my own knowledge, and of several incumbents whose churches and parishes I can see from the place in which I sit and write; so that in regard to the incumbents, there are millions through the land who have literally no man that careth for their souls. What a consideration! What a fearful consideration!

And is all this known, and yet tolerated? Yes, it is known; it is tolerated; it is often facilitated by those whose duty it is to stand in the gap: and what is still more fearful and alarming, it is barred from remedy by the dispensations and licences of our spiritual rulers.

If any thing can unloose the binding sinews of a state; if any thing can weaken and destroy that religious principle which is the only sure bond of its peace and security; if any thing can render

an established religion inefficient for the purposes intended by it; if any thing can arouse the displeasure of Almighty God against it, alienate the affections of the people from it, render it loathsome in their estimation, make them desire its downfall, and raise their shout,—down with it! down with it! even to the ground! there is then in this sad and fearful dereliction of principle and of duty a cause afforded, and which, without a speedy remedy, is sufficient of itself to effect eventually the ruin of both. Perhaps half the population of the country have already left the establishment, and ranged themselves under the standard of dissent. And if we add to this, the very slight attention paid to religion by a great majority of the rest, we shall soon perceive the critical situation in which we stand, and how very easy a concurrence of events may turn the scale against us, and involve both the church and the state in one and the same overwhelming ruin.

Notice has been given by one of our senators in the great council of the nation, that the schoolmaster is already abroad. What may be the event of this, it is impossible to decide. The effects of his instruction, however, we already begin to witness. The eyes of men are opening. They have already began to look about. Speculation is casting forth her entangling net, and thousands are caught in its snares. And shall we

sit still and deceive ourselves with the deceitful and soothing cry of peace, peace, when the hand of God has gone out against us? Surely a different conduct highly becomes us; or destruction comes suddenly upon us, and there be none to deliver us. Whether the judicious and excellent Hooker foresaw the tremendous judgments which shortly after his times befel the nation and the church, is a grave question to answer: it is more than probable that he did, from the affecting manner in which he called his contemporaries to attend every man to his duty. "The sum," says he, "of every Christian man's duty is to labour by all means towards that which other men seeing in us may justify; and what we ourselves must accuse if we fall into it, that by all means we can to avoid; considering especially, that as hitherto upon the church there never yet fell a tempestuous storm, the vapours whereof were not first noted to rise from coldness in affection, and from backwardness in duties of service towards God: so if that which the tears of antiquity have uttered concerning this point should be here set down, it would assuredly be enough to soften, and to mollify a heart of steel."

If any thing had been capable of alarming the fears of men, surrounded with so many dangers, and of exciting them to repentance—to do their first works, and to turn unto the Lord with weeping and supplication, one would have sup-

posed that this seasonable and affecting appeal to their consciences must have produced it. Some, like-minded with this most wise and excellent man, seeing the approaching storm, adopted the advice of the prophet, prostrated themselves between the porch and the altar, cried, "Spare thy people, O Lord; and give not thine heritage to reproach." But the great bulk, as if infatuated by judicial blindness, persisted in their evil ways, till they saw and felt their sin in the fearful punishment they were called to endure.

How such persons may now continue to act with so many dangers constantly staring them in the face, is not for me to say. Excuses are easily invented by those who have no heart to that duty which God, the church, and the souls committed to their care so imperiously demand. Some indeed there are, who, if they can escape the civil penalties denounced against their sins, by being sheltered under the abused privileges and protection of the law, will fearlessly outbrave all the consequences in the eternal world. Wise laws, when wisely and efficiently administered, are certainly among the first of temporal blessings. But if these wise and good laws are abused and perverted, either by those for whom they were never intended, or by those whose duty it is to administer them, they then become, if not the cause, yet the abettors of many grievous and infinite evils. That they are often thus abused

and perverted, and made to serve purposes they were never intended, is beyond dispute. In every such case, it is a matter greatly to be deplored: but in the case before us, where the honour of God, the interests of true religion, and the salvation of men are so deeply concerned, it then becomes a matter so alarming in its consequences, that it is impossible to calculate the fearful extent of mischief and misery they are made to produce. I am aware of the difficulties, in the instance in question, with which the rulers of the church have constantly to contend. Whether they sought that discretionary power with which the law invests them, I am unable to resolve: if they did, they have certainly brought upon themselves a burden, from which, if they feel it as they ought, they must daily pray, to obtain a speedy and a good deliverance. Till this takes place, let them meet their difficulties with firmness, and exercise their authority in the fear of God, always remembering their fearful responsibility, and the account they must shortly give of their stewardship before the judgment seat of Christ. With these remarks I shall close the present enquiry, only observing, that though we may by contrivance pervert and evade the designs of men, it will be found in the end 'a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

The Third Question stated and answered.

Has every incumbent in the kingdom no more than one benefice with the cure of souls?

If we keep in mind that which has been already stated on the previous question, respecting the nature and design of the Christian ministry, and the obligations those are under who minister in divine things, to attend personally to the discharge of those important duties, which their own solemn engagements and their holy profession demand; we shall see at once the sad impropriety of placing themselves in such a situation, which, while it doubles their fearful responsibility, puts them under the inevitable necessity of violating their engagements, and neglecting the eternal interests of half of those who are committed to their care. To think of performing by deputy, that which they have engaged themselves personally to perform, and to be satisfied therewith, shews such a want of principle, and is such a dereliction of duty, as can never comport with that spirit and character, which the ministers of Christ are bound and expected to maintain. Is not God the Father of Spirits? Are not souls the purchase of Jesus Christ? Hath he not given it in charge to the ministers of his grace, to feed his sheep? Is not a dispensation committed to them, to preach the Gospel to those intrusted to

their care? And does not St. Paul say, when contemplating this infinite trust, and the obligations under which he was laid to attend continually to this very thing, "Woe unto me, if I preach not the Gospel?" These are considerations of such solemn weight and grave importance, that it is impossible to conceive how any man, duly impressed with the fearful responsibility of the ministerial office, and the immense and infinite interests committed to his charge, can think for a moment, for the sake of worldly gain, to barter both his own salvation and the salvation of those whom he hath engaged constantly and personally to serve. "But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and, in addition to this, by his neglect, be the cause of destruction to others? Would ten thousand worlds, for ten thousand generations, be a sufficient compensation for such a loss? It cost more than this to redeem a soul from death! And shall any of those for whom the Saviour died, be lost through the personal neglect of those to whom they are committed in charge, as the ministers of his grace? Fearful will be found the guilt of those in the eternal world, when at their hands their blood shall be required. Let no man, then, deceive himself in this infinitely important matter. It was the overwhelming responsibility of the ministerial office that excited many, very many, of the best of men in the early times of

Christianity, to flee from, rather than seek an office which brought with it so many dangers, and such awful responsibility. A deep and lively sense of this, and of their own insufficiency for so great a work, presented such formidable obstacles in their way, that they were rather compelled than gave consent to take upon them so weighty a charge.

Pluralities in those days were utterly out of the question. For a long period nothing of the kind was ever once contemplated. And so alarmed were the early fathers at the base attempt, when first made, that in the Fourth General Council at Chalcedon, where pluralities first appear to have been noticed, they are mentioned and condemned in the tenth canon, in the following manner:—

"No clerk shall at the same time belong to two churches; to wit, to that in which he was first ordained, and to that to which as being the greater he has gone, out of a desire of vainglory; for such as do so, ought to be sent back to that church in which they were first ordained, and to serve there only; but if any has been translated from one church to the other, he shall receive nothing out of his former church, nor out of any chapel or almshouse belonging to it; and such as shall transgress this definition of this general council, are condemned by it to be degraded."

The first attempt at a practice utterly unknown to the church for so long a time, had its origin it seems in a desire of vain glory. But when the wealth of the churches had increased, and godliness began to decline, a worldly spirit succeeded, and men began to be allured into the sacred office rather by a covetous desire to obtain its emoluments, than to promote the honour and glory of God, and the spiritual benefit of the people. This sordid spirit therefore having once crept into the house of God, deviations from primitive practice gradually succeeded. Laws and canons indeed were instantly made, and renewed in succeeding ages with strict attention, in order to check and repress the accursed evil: but guilty mammon, having once got possession of those in high places, they were always so constantly defeated by the carelessness or connivance of worldly and wicked rulers, or by the Pope, who, as the pretended vicar of Christ, either assumed the power himself of dispensing at pleasure with all laws human or divine; or was urged to it by others in order to enrich themselves at the expense of the souls of the people, till they made at length the church, which should have been the house of God, through many centuries a shocking den of the very worst of thieves: ecclesiastical benefices and dignities of every description, were bought and sold, at first, secretly; but afterwards as

publicly as any other commodity. The highest bidder was always the successful purchaser; and so long as he could satisfy the covetous demands of the pope and his mercenary dependants, he was sure of a dispensation from him to hold as many livings as he could procure, either by this or any other means within his power. "Bois de Clare," says Burn, "rector of St. Peter in the east, Oxford, in the eighth year of Edward the first, was presented by the earl of Gloucester to the church of Wyston in Northamptonshire, and obtained a dispensation from the pope, to hold the same, together with one church in Ireland, and fourteen other churches in England; in all seventeen, and in nine different dioceses." Shocking as this may appear, it is only a sample of that state of things which existed for centuries every where through the world, under the spiritual dominion of the pope. The head being thus corrupt, it was too much to expect that the members should be sound. Their sacred profession they made the stepping-stone to ambition and wealth. Gain with them was all the godliness to which they aspired; and so long as the people submitted to the exactions, and consented to buy their wares, so long did they leave them in the indulgence of every crime.

Well would it have been for this country, if it had never been united with Rome; and still better for our holy religion, had every vestige of

popery been extirpated at the reformation of religion in this land. Unhappily, however, this was not the case.

Henry the VIIIth, not being able to bring the pope into his own measures for repudiating his wife, took at length the matter into his own hand; renounced the authority of the pope within these realms, and by an act of parliament, transferred all his authority and all the privileges that he claimed and exercised of conferring indulgences, dispensations, &c. &c. to the Archbishop of Canterbury; and confirmed to the other bishops all the authority and privileges they had hitherto enjoyed while in connexion with the See of Rome. All application therefore to the pope, by the subjects of the king, was absolutely forbidden; and to render the matter palatable to the influential part of the nation, so many provisions were made in their favour, says Burnet, "that the nobility, clergy, and the more eminent of the gentry, knights in particular, were so taken care of, that the bills which effected this change could meet with no great opposition in parliament."

It will greatly surprise some to find, that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the metropolitan of all protestant England, still enjoys by legislative enactment, all the power, privileges, and prerogatives formerly claimed by the pope, in the full plenitude of his undisputed sway, within these realms. It is true, that the act which conferred

this power contains some limitations. There is a restraining clause which prohibits the exercise of this power in any matter, which is either *malum in se*, or contrary or repuguant to the Holy Scriptures, and the laws of Almighty God. On the provisions of this, and another odious act, which has been the occasion, says Burnet, of so much scandal and disorder in the church, all the privileges ever since claimed for pluralities and non-residence, are founded. In all other cases, the light of divine truth, which has since blessed the land, has so undervalued them in the general esteem, that no person ever thinks of applying for those indulgences which his grace is empowered to grant, except the rich, in the case of special licences to be married in any other place than the church. The clergy, and the clergy alone, apply to *purchase*, (for so it is termed,) dispensations to hold preferment with the cure of souls, incompatible either with the law of the land, the designs of the founders of the church, their own solemn promises, vows, and engagements, made at the sacred altar of the Lord, and the clear injunctions of the word of God. I blame not the chief prelate of the land for being invested with power conferred upon him by bad men, in bad times and for bad purposes, but I certainly blame him for exercising this power for such purposes in these protestant times, when it is left to his own discretion whether he will

exercise it or not. All the inconvenience he can sustain by his refusal, is the transfer for the time, of the power invested in him to two or three other bishops; who, if they think it right on investigating the matter, they may grant. But what king, or what adviser of the king, in times like the present, would think of pressing the matter to this extremity? or what bishops would undertake an office, at once so odious to true christian and protestant principle and feeling, and so entirely contrary to common sense, and the word of God? It is extremely painful to be obliged to use language of this description, where the highest authorities are concerned: but when acts of parliament, made in bad times, and for bad ends, are perverted and stretched to serve bad purposes, and only by the clergy, for the purpose of enriching themselves at the expense of the souls of the people, it is enough to make the very stones and timber in every church, so obtained, to cry out against them. But supposing the laws made in popish times to have any force in these protestant days, is it not degrading for clergymen alone, while all other classes hold them in abhorrence, to take advantage of them, and where their sole object is to enrich themselves by the wealth of the church? Is it not also degrading in the extreme, to see the first prelate of the land, selling his dispensations and indulgences to the clergy, for purposes which have always been

considered as an odious and sinful privilege claimed by the pope?

"But after all," says Burnet, "it is to be confessed, that a law does indeed change the legal and political nature of things; it gives a title to freehold property; but no human law can change the moral or divine laws and cancel their authority. If a false religion is settled by law, it becomes indeed the legal religion; but is not a wit the truer for that: and therefore if the laws of the Gospel oblige clerks to personal labour, as was formerly made out, an act of parliament may indeed qualify a man in law to enjoy the benefice, whether he labour in it or not; but it can never dissolve his obligations to residence and personal labour"—nor take away the guilt of seizing that to his own use, which, for other purposes, was solemnly given and dedicated for ever to God.

Taking this to be correct, in what light then must we view these dispensations and licences granted to the clergy, for non-residence, and for holding a plurality of benefices, with the cure of souls? If the solemn vows and promises demanded in the name of God and his church, and made by the clergy before the sacred altar of the Lord at the time of their ordination, have in them the nature of oaths, and if the very taking of a benefice have in it an obligation of residence, and of personal attention to the duties it requires,

then these licences and dispensations have in them the nature of dissolving these obligations; and, to speak the truth, of absolving the clergy from the solemn oaths made unto God. No reasoning or act of parliament can set aside this; and how the archbishops and bishops can stand up in their places in the house of lords and reject the popish question, because of the dispensing power of the pope, while they themselves are exercising the same power, and in the most fearful way, is to me a matter so utterly inexplicable, that I really cannot understand it: nor is it possible, till it can be clearly proved that that which is generally considered most highly heinous, dangerous, and criminal in the conduct of the pope, becomes honest, inoffensive, and innocent in the sight of God, when exercised by the protestant bishops of these realms. But this, I take it, can never be proved: nay, the act itself, in my mind, prohibits the very practice on which it is founded. It does not say that such dispensations or licences shall be granted. It leaves it entirely to the discretion of the archbishop and bishops, whether they will grant or not: but for a thing, *malum in se*, or for any cause or matter contrary or repugnant to the Holy Scriptures, and the laws of Almighty God, the act says, that "he shall in no manner wise grant any dispensation or licence whatever." And is not the holding of more benefices than one with the cure of souls,

when the souls of one of these benefices must in the nature of things be neglected, a thing *malum in se?* Is it not contrary and repugnant to the Holy Scriptures, and the laws of Almighty God, to dispense with the solemn promises, vows, and engagements which a clergyman has made at the sacred altar of the Lord? And does not every dispensation and licence for holding more benefices than one, absolutely amount to this? Surely there can be but one answer to all these questions. I put it then to the common sense of any man, whether the act itself does not absolutely prohibit dispensations and licences for plurality of benefices, with cure of souls.

But it may be asked, are there no cases in which a plurality of benefices may be held? There are but two cases, and two only as far as I can learn, wherein the canonists allow that a dispensation or licence for holding two benefices may be lawful. The first is the want of fit and sufficient men for the service of the church: and the second, when a church is so poor, that the profits which arise out of it do not afford a competent maintenance for a minister.

Whatever might have been the case at the time of the reformation, or at any other period in the history of our church, the number and character of the clergy, in the present day, precludes entirely the necessity of a plurality of benefices, as stated in the first case; therefore,

according to the reasoning of the canonists, dispensations and licences for holding two benefices with the cure of souls, are so far unlawful.

In regard to the second case, the question arising is, What is a competent maintenance for a minister? "This, all the canonists bring very low," says Burnet, "to that which can just maintain him: and they have so cloyed it, that no pretence should be given by so general a word to covetousness, voluptuousness, or ambition." But this does not completely answer the question. That which was sufficient in former times just to maintain a minister, would be inadequate in the present day. It will be necessary, therefore, to refer to that which the law, as it now exists, considers a sufficient maintenance for a curate. The lowest sum I think is £75. a year, and the highest £150. Taking this, therefore, as a competent maintenance for a minister, and surely there can be no question respecting it, since it is the grave opinion of the whole legislature, king, lords spiritual and temporal, and the whole house of commons, solemnly considered and deliberately adopted and promulgated in an act of parliament. According to the reasoning then of the canonists, dispensations and licences for holding two benefices with cure of souls, when the income of the second amounts to £75, I will say a £100. a year and upwards, are unlawful. Pluralities below this sum may be lawfully held

according to the reasoning of the canonists, if they be so near together as that the incumbent can personally serve them. Where two such are not so near as to be thus served, it would be advisable to let them go to the nearest adjoining parishes. This, beside being the best way to serve them, would afford considerable relief to an aged or infirm minister, by helping him to keep a curate, and thus jointly provide for the service of both, and to the great advantage both of the incumbent, the curate, and the people. It is a great detriment to a new beginner, and often highly injurious both to the church and the people, to be placed alone, as is now but too generally the case, and without any to direct, to advise, to encourage, or to restrain him. Often, very often indeed, when he begins his ministry, he has almost every thing to learn: bad habits, therefore, of study, composition, delivery, and the performance of duties, are often fallen into, and when once contracted are seldom got rid of; and the most promising expectations are entirely disappointed. If it could be so devised, every young man ought to spend two or three years under the care, inspection, and service of a judicious, sensible, devoted, and truly experienced minister. His testimonial respecting him should be the chief passport to his advancement. And if young men were always put upon a trial of this description, great advantage would accrue

both to themselves and to the church which they were afterwards to serve. But against this the present practice of permitting so many pluralists is utterly opposed.

How far this prevails is not easy to determine. The bishop of Winchester, who has hitherto been my guide, has completely left me in the dark. He says indeed, that the curates in the diocese of Llandaff are the greatest pluralists. I wish his lordship had told us what had become of all the incumbents. Either there must be a very considerable number of non-resident incumbents, or of pluralists, or there could never have been so many curates who are such great pluralists; and which the bishop signified his intention to curtail. I blame not but commend his lordship's intention in this; but it would have had a better appearance with it, to have begun at the head rather than the tail. His lordship I hope will excuse this observation, as it may suggest the propriety of dealing even-handed justice both with the great and the small. Distinctions of this description are odious things, and no one can adopt them without lowering himself in the general esteem.

But in regard to the number of pluralists, what is the estimate we are warranted in forming? It may surprise some, when I say, that one half of the livings in the kingdom, and those of the richest kind, are held in this double and treble

form. Taking a view of the state of things as they exist within the space of six or seven miles every way from the place in which I sit and write, they will be found, I fear, in the proportion of five to one. Circumstanced as this district is, it would have been thought that they should rather have been one to five. If then the rest be found in any thing like the same proportion, I am very much indeed below the calculation when I state it to be one half.

Taking this, however, to be a fair calculation upon the whole, what an alarming reflection is it calculated to excite! Three-fourths of these, singly, can well support an incumbent. Three-fourths of them therefore, according to the reasoning of the canonist, are held unlawfully; and, as Burnet states, "Merely for the making of a family, for the support of luxury, or vanity, or other base and covetous designs.

What idea the church had of this hateful practice, under Lewis the Good, in the year 829, the 49th canon of the sixth council of Paris particularly describes. The canon, according to Burnet's translation, runs thus:—

"As it becomes every city to have its proper bishop; so it is also becoming and necessary that every church dedicated to God should have its proper priest. Yet covetousness, which is idolatry, (of which we are much ashamed,) has so got hold of some priests, and caught them captives

in its fetters, that they, blinded with it, know neither whither they go, nor what they ought to be, or do; so that they being kindled with the fire of covetousness, and forgetful of the priestly dignity, neglecting the care of those churches to which they were promoted, do, by some present given or promised, procure other churches, not only from clerks, but from laymen, in which they do against law undertake to perform the ministry of Christ. It is not known whether their bishops are consulted in this matter or not; if they are, without doubt, their bishops become partakers in their sin; yet if they presume to do it without consulting them, yet it is to be imputed to the bishop's negligence. There is scarce a priest to be found who warreth worthily and diligently in that church in which he is dedicated, to the divine service: but how much less will he be able to do that worthily in two, three, or more churches? This practice brings a reproach on the christian religion, and a confusion on the priestly order. The covetousness of the clergy is censured by the people. The worship of God is not performed in places consecrated to him; and, as was observed in the former chapter, the souls of the people are thereby much endangered. Wherefore we do all unanimously appoint that no bishop suffer this to be done in his parish (or diocese) any more; and we decree, that every church that has a congregation belonging to it, and has means by

which it may subsist, shall have its proper priest; for if it has a congregation, but has not means by which it may subsist, that matter is left to the bishop to consider whether it can or ought to be supported or not. But it is especially recommended to their care to see, that under this pretence, no priest may out of covetousness hold two or three churches, in which he cannot serve, nor perform the worship of God."

Under this pretence it is, that pluralities are now allowed and sought. Whether, however, it is thought that such a flimsy pretence will blind the minds of the people to the covetousness and wickedness of those who seize and grasp two or three of the best and richest preferments which the church affords, is a different question; and deserves the serious attention both of those who hold, and of those who permit such a sacrilegious profanation of that which was given and dedicated to God for other and more important purposes. On all hands, I think, it is openly confessed that the privileges granted in the former times of the church from the necessity of circumstances, are perverted and abused to the worst of purposes. All, I think, equally acknowledge that such privileges were designed only to be temporary: and it is a question which deserves the serious consideration of the rulers of the church and the state, whether these privileges are not entirely done away with, at least as far as they are inconsistent with our book

of ordination, which is a part of our liturgy, and likewise a part of the law of the land. In the ordination service, constant attendance and diligent personal labour is made necessary; and since this law, as Burnet observes, "is subsequent to the act of the 21st of Henry VIIIth, that qualifies so many for pluralities and non-residence, and is in plain terms contrary to it; this, as subsequent, does repeal all that it contradicts. It is upon all this a matter that to me seems plain, that by this law the other is repealed, in so far as it is inconsistent with it. This argument is, by this consideration, made the stronger, that the act of King Henry does not enact that such things shall be, but only reserves privileges for such as may be capable of an exemption from the common and general rules. Now by the principles of law, all privileges or exemptions of that sort, are odious things; and the construction of law lying hard and heavy against odious cases, it appears to me, according to the general grounds of law, very probable, (I speak within bounds when I say only probable) that the act of uniformity, which makes the offices of ordination a part of the law of England, is a repeal of that part of the act of King Henry which qualifies for pluralities. To conclude, whatever may be the strength of this plea in bar to that act, if our faith given to God and his church in the plainest and most express words possible, does bind; if promises given at the

altar do oblige; and if a stipulation in the consideration of which orders are given, is sacred, and of indispensable obligation; then I am sure this is." P. C. P. 171.

Well would it have been for our holy religion, for the church to which we belong, and for the credit and honour of her ministers, had they always considered the engagements in this solemn and indispensable light. That they have considered and acted otherwise, and still do the same, is beyond dispute. A disposition, alas! has always prevailed, and does still prevail, both to evade this, and to force an extension, rather than to suffer an abridgment of the privileges granted under that odious act, which has been of such great detriment unto the church. Hence the abuse of chaplaincy to a lord whom they never serve:—the sordid adherence to, and abuse of the king's book of valuation;—in opposition to common sense, honesty, and fact, claiming to hold a living because it is under eight pounds a year, when it is well known to themselves and every body else, that it is nearer £800. a year: and hence also, by a construction of their own, against both law and reason, and the judgment of early judges, turning thirty miles, the extent of distance which the law allows for the holding of pluralities, literally into forty-five.

But even this is not regarded any more than the other. Clergymen are now allowed to hold prefer-

ment at any distance whatever. Nay, they may hold as many as they can get of a certain description; and what is worse, there is no remedy so long as the bishop, contrary to the intention of the law, will protect them by his licence of non-residence.

"It is not obscure," says good Master Hooker, "how incommodious the church hath found the abuse of that favour which law, in other considerations affordeth, touching residence and plurality of spiritual livings. Now that which is practised corruptly to the detriment and hurt of the church, against the purpose of those very laws which notwithstanding are pretended in defence and justification thereof, we must needs acknowledge no less repugnant to the grounds and principles of common right, than the fraudulent proceedings of tyrants to the principles of just sovereignty."

How far the good of the people is considered, or whether at all in proceedings and transactions of this description, is not so obscure, as to need any serious investigation to ascertain. "It may be," says Hooker, "that the fear of a *quare impedit* doth cause institutions to pass more easily than otherwise they would. And to speak plainly the truth, it may be, that writs of *quare non impedit* were for these times most necessary in the other place; yet where law will not suffer men to follow their own judgment, to shew their

judgment they are not hindered. And I doubt not but that even conscienceless and wicked patrons, of which sort the swarms are too great in the church of England, are more emboldened to present unto bishops any refuse, by finding so easy acceptation thereof. Somewhat they might redress this sore, notwithstanding so strong impediments, if it did plainly appear that they took it indeed to heart, and were not in a manner contented with it." But, "shall we look," (adds this eminent man, addressing the bishops,) "for care in admitting whom others present, if that which some of yourselves confer be at any time corruptly bestowed? A foul and an ugly kind of deformity it hath, if a man do but think what it is for a bishop to draw commodity and gain from those things whereof he is left a free bestower, and that in trust, without any other obligation than his sacred order only, and that religious integrity which hath been presumed on in him. Simoniacal corruption, I may not for honour's sake suspect to be, amongst men of so great place. So often they do not, I trust, offend by sale, as by unadvised gift of such preferments, wherein that ancient canon should especially be remembered, which forbiddeth a bishop *to be led by human affection, in bestowing the things of God.* A fault no where so hurtful as in bestowing places of jurisdiction, and in furnishing cathedral churches, the prebendaries and other dignities

whereof are the very true successors of those ancient presbyters, which were at the first as councellors unto bishops. A foul abuse it is, that any one man should be loaded as some are with livings of this kind, yea some even of them who condemn utterly the granting of any two benefices unto the same man, whereas the other is in truth a matter of far greater sequel; as experience would soon shew if churches cathedral, being furnished with the residence of a competent number of virtuous, grave, wise, and learned divines, the rest of the prebends of every such church, were given *within the diocese unto men of worthiest desert, for their better encouragement unto industry and travail.*" E. P. 7th B.

In this extract we observe the sound judgment of this great and judicious man on the point in question, and how much the evils might be redressed, if it did plainly appear that the rulers of the church took it indeed to heart, and were not in a manner contented with it, and promoters of it, by their own example; in dispensing that preferment intrusted to their care, for other purposes and to other men, than the pious founders clearly designed. But in regard to prebends, perhaps the wiser course would be, to let the dignity and the income attached to them go to the clergymen of the parishes from whence they are both derived. This, I take it, was the intention of the founders, and it would answer the

double purpose of securing a respectable resident ministry, and the better instruction of the people, from amongst whom the income is drawn. To be held as sinecures, by persons living out of the diocese and doing no clerical duty whatever, was certainly not the intention of the founders. For the special performance of certain services, and for the special and spiritual benefit of the people resident in the district or parish named, the tithes, &c. were originally given, and dedicated to God for ever.

To claim and receive these tithes, &c. thus dedicated, without performing personally the duties required, will be found, I fear, on due consideration, little less than sacrilege; nor can any law innocently give, or any man innocently hold in such a case, that which belongs to God alone. Sacrilege is said to be, "the crime of appropriating to himself what is devoted to religion; the crime of robbing heaven." "Will a man rob God?" it is solemnly asked in Scripture. And is it not robbing God, for a man to take and appropriate to his own use, that which was solemnly given and dedicated to God for ever, without performing the duties required? I ask this question for a satisfactory solution; being fearful that it will be found as criminal now, as in the days of that prophet whom God inspired to denounce his displeasure against such peculators amongst the Jews. Should this be the case—it will then be

found, notwithstanding the protection afforded by the law, a most "fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The bishop of Winchester, in his charge at Llandaff, says, "No diocesan, I believe, has ever yet addressed his clergy without expressing in strong terms his sense of the injury inflicted on the church by the non-residence of her ministers;"—and I will add that few there have been who have not expressed in strong terms their sense of the injury inflicted on the church by so many pluralities of livings with cure of souls, being held by her ministers. But how many bishops have there been or are there, who do not promote by their own practice, the very evils they condemn? In regard to the first, his lordship says, "The language of the canonists on this subject is very explicit; and the legislature at all times, and especially in a late act, has shewn so much anxiety to co-operate with the ecclesiastical law in this particular, that the power of granting licences of non-residence is now reduced within very narrow limits. Indeed, the liabilities of incumbents are so distinctly defined, that little or nothing is left to the discretion of the bishop in this matter." Either his lordship is mistaken in this matter, or the bishops generally and grossly abuse the discretion with which the legislature has invested them. The non-resident clergy, I verily believe, are nearly as numerous as they ever were;—and instead of remedying

the evil, whatever were the intentions of the legislature, the act in question has rendered it so safe and permanent, that it cannot be reached or redressed, so long as the diocesan in his discretion thinks fit to allow and protect it. In regard to pluralities; is it not notorious to every man who has given his attention to the subject, that the bishops, in bestowing their preferment, make as many pluralists, and of the richest kind, as any other patrons whatever? A prelate, in his visitation the last year, and one from whom the best things were expected, I have been informed both preached against, and in his charge condemned, the practice both of non-residence and pluralities. But how did this prelate's practice correspond with his preaching and his charge? Before the sound of his voice had well ceased in the ears of his auditors, he made one of his hearers a pluralist; and almost against his will. The people were astonished, as well they might. The person on whom he conferred the living, though a most respectable man, had already one of six or seven hundred pounds a year. The inconsistency of the bishop was so glaring, as to excite the contempt of his hearers; since he must have determined, while in the act of delivering his charge, to adopt the next moment the very practice he condemned. Had his lordship conferred this piece of preferment on one of the worthiest of those curates whom he insisted should give up

one of their curacies, and thus abridge them of the miserable pittance with which their rectors or vicars rewarded them for doing those duties, which they themselves had vowed before God and the church they would personally perform; —his conduct would have appeared in that light which the people of England would be always happy to witness in all our bishops. He might thus have helped a worthy man; encouraged the rest of the curates zealously to attend to their duties, in hopes that at some time they might be similarly rewarded;—and gained the esteem of the people, which by this injudicious act, he turned into contempt against himself, and the order to which he belonged. While then the bishops themselves are as deep in the mire, as the lay-patrons whose practice they condemn, with what propriety can they refuse institution to those whom they present? If they really seek the good of the church, and mean what they pretend, let them set the example; and never give any of their preferment to be held in this double and treble form. Let them adopt this practice, and religiously adhere to it in the fear of God; and then we shall have reason to expect that this crying and accursed evil, under which the church groans, will eventually be redressed.

It is a question with me, whether the bishops can be compelled to institute or licence to more benefices than one with the cure of souls. In

regard to dispensations, these are entirely left to the discretion of the archbishop of Canterbury, whether he will grant them or not. And in regard to the licences of the bishops, the act only says that it may be lawful to grant such licences, if on due consideration of all the circumstances of the case, it should appear, in the judgment of the bishop, proper so to do. The power, it appears to me, is entirely left in their hands. They can refuse any application they may think improper, even without being obliged to state their reasons. And if they felt the fearful responsibility of their situation, and the awful account they must give for all their proceedings before the judgment-seat of Christ, they would certainly make a stand, and unitedly set their faces against practices which are so highly disgraceful in themselves; so injurious to Christianity; so dishonourable to God; so dangerous to the souls of men; and so ruinous to the character and stability of the religious establishment of the land.

"A bishop," says Hooker, "in whom there did plainly appear the marks and tokens of a fatherly affection towards them that are under his charge, what good might he do ten thousand ways more than any man knows how to set down? But the souls of men are not loved: that which Christ shed his blood for is not esteemed precious. This is the very root, the fountain of all negligence in church government." B. 7, p. 211.

What their lordships may think of this declaration of one of the most excellent and judicious of men, is not for me to say. But what the people think is a different question; and though they may sometimes mistake, I do really from my conscience believe that no persons on earth would be more highly esteemed than our bishops, if there did plainly appear in them, and in their general proceedings, the marks and tokens of a fatherly affection towards those that are under their charge and committed to their care. This would give them an unbounded influence over them; and there would be hardly any thing which they would not readily adopt for the general good, when it came thus recommended, and kindly and affectionately proposed.

We have certainly on the bench some individuals, who for their piety, learning, zeal, and fatherly affection, would have done honour to their high profession in any country, or in any age. The people are looking up to them in expectation that by their means, a different state of things may be eventually witnessed: but generally speaking, from the glaring evils which are tolerated and practised in this high quarter, and the injury which the church sustains thereby as a body, they have lost the confidence of the people. This is no obscure matter. Thoughtful and judicious persons, and sincerely attached to the church, are seriously offended at the glaring

improprieties which are suffered to prevail. To offer any defence for such practices, is utterly impossible; and to be obliged either to be silent, or to join in the general contempt in which they are held, is to them a matter of a very painful concern. Sceptical persons, on witnessing in the ministers of the church such a total disregard to their solemnly promised attention to their duty, naturally conclude, either that religion is a mere invention of state, to keep the people in awe of, and in obedience to, their rulers; or that it is matter of no moment whatever to pay any regard to it, when its paid, cherished, patronized, and licenced guardians shew to it, and their own solemn engagements, no serious regard. Between such ministers and themselves, they can see no difference but what is in their own favour. Nay, they conceive themselves to have greatly the advantage; and therefore they are by this confirmed in their sceptical notions. Their conduct being more consistent with the principles they hold, they readily conclude that they are the more honest, and therefore the more deserving of the general esteem, than those who, professing religion to be of the utmost importance to the souls of men, neither seriously attend to it themselves, nor teach it to those to whom both by law and duty they are so solemnly bound.

Beside these, there are others, who, on witnessing such improper and inexcusable conduct,

make it the ground of their secession from the Established church. Whether they are justified in this, is a different question: but such a handle being given for the keen remark and sarcasm of those who are opposed to that form of religion which the state provides, they naturally conclude that they will be better instructed and cared for in a religious sense, by those who make it their constant business and unwearied and personal care to attend upon the very thing, than by those who by their constant absence from their charge, render it impossible for them to give, as well as difficult for others to believe that they have any, the least regard for their spiritual welfare. To defend such persons and practices, is out of the power of any conscientious man. To rebut the charges brought against them, or against the rulers of the church for permitting or tolerating them, much more for abetting them, is utterly impossible. On all sides, therefore, the church is exposed to contempt, reproach, and danger. She has lost the respect, esteem, and confidence of millions, who, had things been otherwise, would never have left her pale. The consequence is, she is so rapidly on the decline, that without a speedy, and I had almost said an unlooked for change for the better, she will certainly fall; and I will leave those who are wise in politics to say, what will then become of the civil constitution of the state.

CHAPTER IV.

Necessity of returning to the original intentions of the founders of the church, with regard to all the plans which they devised, and the regulations they adopted; in order to render her efficient for the purpose intended;—to regain the confidence of the people;—and to preserve her in existence.

"THERE never was any thing by the wit of man, so well devised or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted." This sensible and judicious remark of our great and excellent reformer, has been grievously verified, as it regards almost all the plans which they devised, and the regulations they adopted for the administration and discipline of that very church, of which, under God, they themselves were the founders. To a very great extent this has been already proved, and the evils consequent thereon made so apparent, as to demand, if possible, their instant removal. Devoutly as this is to be desired, it is but too evident that that which by length of time has been gradually corrupted and perverted, is and must be beyond the reach of *immediate* correction.

But however far we may have gone from the original designs and regulations of the founders of

the church, by secularizing that which was intended for other and better purposes, the holy apparatus which under God they wisely devised and established, still retains within itself both the means and power of its own reformation. In times like the present, this is by no means a matter of inferior moment. The process may be slow, but the effects would be certain, if all our spiritual rulers would take it indeed to heart;—seek by the grace of God to be themselves what the church designed;—and exercise that tender regard for the souls of men and the interests of true religion, which the Holy Scriptures everywhere demand.

Without this, very little indeed can be done by those in inferior stations, to retard the course of a falling establishment. However prudently, conscientiously, or zealously, their efforts may be directed, they can reach no further than their own particular charge. The course of the stream being constantly against them, their purposes will be always defeated, and they will finally be overwhelmed. If this be true, and the sad history of the church, when last overthrown, leaves I think no question on the subject—then ought we to learn wisdom from the things she has suffered, and begin in time, where chiefly rests the power of reform. I am aware that no human power can change the hearts of men; and that it is equally beyond its reach to communicate right

sentiments and feelings, where sentiments and feelings of this description have no existence. But it can use the means under God to produce all these. It can do more,—it can correct externally that which is wrong; it can command attention to neglected duties; it can appoint to the highest stations, those whom the church designed; prevent the intrusion of improper persons into the sacred ministry; and shew that it is not unmindful of the important purposes for which it is instituted. This, I take it, is all that it can do. And if exercised under the influence of the fear of God, and that tender regard to the souls of men which the Scriptures demand, it would not be exercised in vain. Much good might be done ten thousand ways, if it did plainly appear that the temporal head, and the spiritual rulers of the church, were all thus influenced and actuated. There is nothing but this, under God, that can enable them to preserve their stations, or to save the church. That time has passed, wherein the name of bishop carried with it associations of a sacred character, and stamped its bearer as a holy man, to whom respect was due, and paid, for his very order's sake. Whatever therefore may be the rank or secular endowments of our spiritual rulers, or of the clergy at large, that respect which was formerly paid to their sacred order, cannot now be acquired, nor will it be afforded as belonging to their habit, or their

profession. "They must deserve respect," says the bishop of Winchester, "before it will be conferred." Seldom will it be withheld, where it is fairly due; but never will it be long bestowed contrary to desert, however high the office, or sacred the function, of him who challenges it. In what estimation would be held a bishop of a right spirit, of primitive piety, and of holy zeal to promote the glory of God and the salvation of men, we have a striking instance in the late universally lamented Heber. The bare mention of his name among all parties, and in every quarter of the world, carries with it associations which command the very highest expressions of regard. What this most excellent prelate without design obtained, it is in the reach of all our bishops to acquire. No men under heaven have it so much in their power to engage the general esteem, if it did as plainly appear in them, as it did in him, that they are of a right spirit, possessed of primitive piety, and animated by the same active and holy zeal to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of men; and considered not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. Was this but clearly seen in their whole spirit and behaviour, all the respect which it is right for a man to receive, would be readily and cheerfully conferred. Their influence would be unbounded; and all the

measures prudently devised, and affectionately recommended for the general good, would meet with the most ready and cheerful acceptance.

As this was the spirit and conduct generally manifested by our first great reformers, and as it was their peculiar aim in all their plans to secure the same, as far as possible, in all their successors, let their lordships duly consider this matter, and their own solemn engagements, in the way their importance demands; and let them endeavour, by the grace of God, to obtain and manifest in every way, the spirit, the piety, and the holy and disinterested zeal, of their great and worthy predecessors. Till this takes place, little will be expected from them, and less will be done. A bare secular and official attention to the routine of canonical forms, they will probably afford; but this being often less than their secular clergy themselves afford, their injunctions will be little regarded, and their threatenings only despised. It requires something more and higher than official dignity and power, either to reclaim the wanderer from duty, or to stimulate the negligent to the duties to be performed, "But," says Hooker, "what with ill usage of their power among the meaner, and what with disusage amongst the higher sort, they are in the eyes of both sorts as bees having lost their sting. It is a long time sithence any great one hath felt, or almost any one much feared, the edge of that ecclesiastical severity which sometime held lords and

dukes in a more religious awe, than now the meanest are able to be kept." But "A bishop," he adds, "in whom there did plainly appear the marks and tokens of a fatherly affection towards them that are under his charge, what good might he do ten thousand ways more than any man knows how to set down? But the souls of men are not loved: that which Christ shed his blood for is not esteemed precious. This is the very root, the foundation of all negligence in church government." "Men," says the same writer, speaking of bishops, "whom it standeth upon to uphold a reverend estimation of themselves in the minds of others, without which the very best things they do are hardly able to escape disgrace, must, before it be over late, remember how much easier it is to retain credit once gotten, than to recover it when lost." "By what means, then, estimation hath hitherto decayed, it is no hard thing to discern." "They are not to look that the world should carry the affection of Constantine, to bring that which might derogate from them, and to cover their imbecilities." More than high time it is, that they bethink themselves of the Apostle's admonition to the Ephesian elders,—"Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers; to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

In this important exhortation, addressed chiefly to bishops, there are three particulars which demand their strict attention. First, They are to take heed to themselves:—Secondly, To all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers:—and, Thirdly, To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

That which is here enjoined, all our bishops at their consecration have solemnly bound themselves to perform. Never was it more necessary for them to attend to all their engagements; and first, to take heed unto themselves,—to the spirit by which they are constantly influenced and actuated,—and the conduct they generally maintain. Both of these the Apostle clearly intended should be in strict conformity with his own, and with the example he had set them in the discharge of his duty. The particulars of these he briefly mentioned, appealing to the consciences of those whom he addressed as to the truth of his statements. And happy must they be, who, next to their Saviour's, copy his example, and attend to his commands. Nothing can so well command the esteem of men, or silence the objections of those who may wish to find fault. In short, it carries along with it such an irresistible testimony, that it commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

But beside this they are required to take heed

" to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers;—to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood."

And what can this mean, but that they are to be very anxious about the spiritual welfare of all committed to their care?—to watch over them—to guard them from danger—to comfort the feeble-minded—to strengthen the weak—to heal the sick—to raise the fallen—to reclaim the wanderer—to rebuke the gain-sayer—to provide pastors over the whole flock, that will feed and lead and guide them by sound doctrine and good example into all the ways of truth and holiness—and to exercise themselves much in preaching the word of life, both in season and out of season, always remembering the account they must give before the judgment-seat of Christ? Such was the design of the Holy Ghost, in the instructions given by the mouth of the Apostle. And such also was the design of the founders of the church, when they obliged all the bishops at their consecration to make personal vows and engagements of this description before the sacred altar of the Lord.

A very great deviation from these designs has evidently taken place. The consequences, as already proved, are most fearful; nor can the rulers of the church be acquitted, either of betraying their awful trust, or of endangering the souls of men, unless they return, in the fear of God,

both to that which the founders of the church designed, and to these their most important duties—to take heed whom they admit to the sacred office, and to the cure of souls; that they be men of sound religion, scriptural in their doctrinal sentiments, and correct in their lives; that they oblige them to constant residence, and to afford to the people all the means of religious instruction and worship which the church designed; that they permit no man to have more than one benefice with cure of souls; and that they so frequently visit, constantly inspect, and make themselves particularly acquainted with all the teachers, people, and affairs of their diocese, that every evil may be corrected,—and the whole church so instructed, fed, and guided, that there may be no place left either for complaint, or error, or for secession from the pale of the church. To worldly minds, this will be found a duty which they will neither like to hear, nor wish to perform. It is no more, however, than the Scriptures require, or than the rulers of the church have engaged in the most solemn manner constantly to discharge. It is the departure from it that has been the cause of all the mischief we behold, and it is only by returning to it that the evil can be remedied, and that the church can recover the ground she has lost.

Bishop Burnet, addressing his own order, says, "We are not only watchmen to watch over the

flock, but likewise over the watchmen themselves. We keep the door of the sanctuary, and will have much to answer for, if through our remissness, or feeble easiness,—if by trusting the examination of those we ordain to others—and, yielding to intercession and importunity, we bring any into the service of the church who are not duly qualified for it. In this we must harden ourselves, and become inexorable, if we will not partake of other mens' sins, and in the mischiefs that these may bring into the church. It is a false pity and a cruel compassion, if we suffer any considerations to prevail upon us in this matter, but those which the Gospel directs. The longer that we know them, before we ordain them; the more that we sift them, and the greater variety of trials through which we may make them pass; we do thereby both secure the quiet of our own consciences the more, as well as the dignity of holy things, and the true interests of religion and the church: for these two interests must never be separated; they are but one and the same in themselves; and what God hath joined together, we must never set asunder."

What is here said respecting the care to be observed in the admission of candidates to sacred orders, will be found good, and particularly applicable to the case of those offering themselves for admission to benefices with the cure of souls. Here, as in the other, the bishop keeps

the door of the sanctuary. Others may present, but they will have much to answer for, if, through their remissness, or feeble easiness in their examination of those presented, they yield to intercession and importunity, and institute any to a benefice with the cure of souls, who are not duly qualified for it. In this, therefore, they must harden themselves, and become inexorable, if they will not partake of other mens' sins, and in the mischiefs that they may do in the church and parish to which they aspire.

It is a false pity, and a cruel compassion, to suffer any considerations to prevail in this matter, but those that the Gospel directs. The honour of God; the dignity of holy things; the everlasting welfare of the souls of men; and the true interests of religion and the church, are so combined in this important matter, that they cannot be separated; and what God hath thus joined together, let no man dare to put asunder.

If the persons presented do not bring with them all the qualifications which the Gospel directs; and the bishop, after due examination, finds this to be the case, (and certainly he is bound by the laws of God and the church to make such examination) he then betrays his awful trust, if he suffer any consideration whatever to induce him to admit such persons. He tampers with the honour of God—the true interests of religion and the church—and exposes

to everlasting danger and death the souls committed to their care. He takes the whole responsibility upon himself. There are no laws, human or divine, that oblige him to admit improper persons. Nay, they are all against him, and in the most clear and pointed manner. Should, therefore, all these interests be sacrificed, and thousands perish for ever in their sins, it is a grave and fearful question to be considered;—at whose hands, in the day of judgment, will their blood be required? But the endless ruin of the bishop and the priest, would never redeem again the souls that may be lost. Is it not then a false and fearful pity, and a cruel and wicked compassion, to suffer any considerations to prevail for the admission of any, either into sacred orders, or into benefices with cure of souls, who do not bring with them all the qualifications which the church directs, and the Scriptures demand? There can be no question on this important matter; and if God be true, and his judgment just, then woe be to them who ordain, or institute, in opposition to his word and will! This, to some, may appear strong and fearful language: but it is neither stronger nor more fearful than the case demands. And if men would seriously consider what the Scriptures demand, and what immense interests are at stake, they would entertain very different ideas on this great and important matter, than most are accustomed to enter-

tain. Either God and his word are true, or they are false. If true, and the church which he purchased with his own blood be precious in his sight, then sure I am a most fearful account must be given somewhere, and by some persons: and to whom can we look but to those who have neglected, perverted, and abused that power and charge intrusted to their care? In regard to candidates for orders, examinations do certainly take place: yet these generally speaking, are neither what the church requires nor the canons demand. But in regard to persons presented for institution, &c. &c. though equally required to be investigated and examined, very few indeed undergo any examination whatever. Here all is taken upon trust. It is true, testimonials from others are required, but the ease with which these important documents are always obtained, render them, as before stated, of little or no consideration. The loose, easy, and secular manner in which these great matters are managed, have been, and still are, the very bane of godliness—the curse of the church under which she groans —and the constant cause of the greatest injury to the souls of men!

Next to these, in point of evil and injury, must be considered non-residence; neglect and omission of prescribed duties; and the hateful practice of plurality of benefices with the cure of souls. The fearful extent in which all these

prevail, has been already described. Is it then consistent with the honour of God, the clear demands of his holy word, the interests of true religion and the church, and the salvation of men, to suffer them to remain? The most secular of all the secularized in these matters, must, in their consciences, say it is not. For none of these great wickednesses reigning in high places, and where they ought not, can there be any just and sufficient apology offered? Common sense, the word of God, the rules and regulations of the church, the avowed designs of her founders, and the best and highest interests of men; all combine with one voice, and agree in one sentence against them. And shall those whom it most concerns, whose duty it is to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers—to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood, sit still, and use no serious efforts to check and remedy these great and crying evils? Shall their extent and magnitude present such obstacles to their imaginations, as to paralyze their exertions, or deter them from making the attempt?

"Most wretched," says Hooker, addressing bishops on this subject, "are the terms of mens' estate when once they are at a point of wretchlessness so extreme, that they bend not their wits any farther than only to shift out the present time,

neither regarding what shall become of their successors after them. Had our predecessors so loosely cast off from them all care and respect for posterity, a church Christian there had not been, about the regimen whereof we should need at this day to strive. It was the barbarous affection of Nero, that the ruin of his own imperial seat he could have been well enough contented to see, in case he might also have seen it accompanied with the fall of the whole world: an affection not more intolerable than their's who care not to overthrow all posterity, so they may purchase a few days of ignominious safety unto themselves and their present estates; if it may be termed a safety which tendeth so fast unto their very overthrow that are the purchasers of it, in so vile and base manner."

Whether this be the state and conduct of any of our spiritual rulers, I will neither affirm nor deny. Certain it is that they either have not the power to remedy the evils complained of, or they do not see the dangers to which the church is exposed, and under which she is sinking; or they would more seriously exert themselves to cure the evil, by adapting their remedies to the inveteracy of the disease.

All complain, all reprove, and some give most excellent advice. Like Eli, they complain, and like him they admonish and reprove; but they will not exert the power with which they are

invested for correction and judgment. Against the curates, some of them have began to exercise their curtailing authority: but against the great ones, non-resident, and pluralists, they lift not a finger that gives them much alarm. This uneven-handed justice, instead of effecting any good, provokes the weak, encourages the strong, and excites in the end the contempt of all. Partial measures, partially administered; and half-measures, will never reach the case. Even-handed justice, guided by wisdom and judgment, and sanctioned by the example of their lordships, in never making any man a pluralist, must exert all its power and energy to meet in every way the circumstances of the case. Without this, nothing effectual either can, or will be done. 'Physician, heal thyself,' will be a rebuff that will always meet them: and when all are equally criminal, there can be very little hope of reform. On this account it is, that all which has hitherto been attempted, has tended rather to increase, than to remedy the evil. That which was only temporary before, because it could be reached and punished, is now rendered safe and permanent under the protecting care, discretion, and licence of the bishop. But is it just? Is it reasonable? Or will it be long tolerated? that the spiritual and eternal interests of the many, are to be sacrificed for the temporal and worldly interests of the few? Surely, this was never intended by

the legislators of the land. They must have been imposed upon. And that judge, who does not fairly balance the claims of all concerned, is unfit for the high station he holds; and he dishonours both himself and his patrons by the wrong that he inflicts on the injured side. Let old age, absolute sickness, and incapacitating infirmity, have all the protection and indulgence which their cases require, and none will complain: but in all other cases, neither non-residence, pluralities, nor omitted duties, should be tolerated for a moment. There is no injustice in this: the inconveniences, if any, and the duties to be performed, were all known at the time of accepting the charge. The undertaking being voluntary, and with the full knowledge and understanding of all the facts and obligations of the case, the injustice must be the act of those, who, wishing to escape from the obligations under which they are bound, and from the duties enjoined, would willingly retain the emoluments, and leave those in the hands of strangers, whom they have engaged, in the most solemn manner, personally to serve.

Surely this can never comport with that injunction which says, both to bishops and to priests, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers: to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Nay, is it not lightly to esteem that which it cost the blood of the Son of God to redeem? And shall he not reckon

with those who regard that so lightly, which he esteemed so precious in his sight? Let all concerned in this important matter, consider it in the way it demands; and let them tremble for the fearful consequences that must finally fall upon themselves, should they retain that which they cannot, or will not serve; neglect their obvious duties; or esteem that of little value, which it cost the sacred blood of the Son of God effectually to redeem.

But beside what has been stated, the injunction of the Apostle, as well as their own solemn engagements, clearly founded thereon, require from the bishops not merely a legal or canonical superintendence of the secular affairs of their dioceses; but a spiritual supervision, inspection, care, and visitation of the whole flock, ministers, and people, of which the Holy Ghost has made them the guardians and overseers. For this the founders of the church made a legal and a binding provision. And there can be no doubt, that if undertaken in the spirit required, and attended to in the manner directed, much, very much good, would generally be the result. But, like all the other regulations which the reformers wisely adopted for the spiritual good of the church, the formal and secular manner in which this is now managed and kept up, renders it, generally speaking, rather an object of contempt, than of real utility to the interests of true religion, and the souls of men.

"Touching bishops' visitations," says Hooker, "the first institution of them was profitable, to the end that the state and condition of churches being known, there might be for evils growing, convenient remedies provided in due time. The observation of church laws, the correction of faults in the service of God, and manners of men: these are things visitors should seek. When these things are inquired of formally, and but for custom's sake, fees and pensions being the only thing which is sought, and little else done by visitations; we are not to marvel if the baseness of the end doth make the action itself loathsome. The good which bishops may do by their visitations, is plainly such as cannot choose but add weight to their heavy account in that dreadful day, if they do it not!"

But how these visitations are generally managed, and what evil rather than good is produced by them, is, I fear, but too obvious to need much explanation. Seldom do the bishops undertake these visitations in person; and almost as seldom in some dioceses is this the case with the archdeacon. Commonly does the former, on the same day when he does visit, order up the children for confirmation. All therefore is bustle and confusion. One service is hurried so fast on the heels of the other, that the season and scene is anything but that which the church designed. By the time that all is over in the church, all are

wearied and very often offended. The little attention that can be shewn to the clergy, or opportunity afforded for communication with their diocesan, one of the great purposes of visitations, drives them to their inn for refreshment, and they return to their homes, lamenting all the way how grievously such important things are managed and perverted. Seldom is there any thing brought forward that is truly interesting for the occasion, either in this or the archdeacon's visitation. When neither attend, which is very often the case, the clergy, except the great ones, are brought, some ten or twenty miles, just to answer to their names, perhaps before a socinian, or other very improper official. The churchwardens are not unfrequently insulted and brow-beaten for things they could not legally attend to. They are obliged to take oaths, which, if they literally fulfil, will subject them to the penalty of the civil law; and if they do not fulfil, to little less, I fear, than deliberate perjury. Such generally is the state of visitations. No wonder then that they are esteemed loathsome, or to be any thing except what they ought to be. As things exist, almost every churchwarden must commit an act bordering on wilful perjury. So little attention is paid to this crying sin, and the conscientious scruples of honest men, that I have known some threatened with excommunication, when they have dared to refuse such horrible profanity. Surely, for honesty's

sake, not to mention the honour of God, and the interests of religion, these things ought instantly to be remedied. If the civil law has superseded the ecclesiastical, either let the oath be dispensed with, or let every question relating thereto, be struck out from the official forms of visitation. That a revision of these questions and regulations has not long since been made, to adapt them to the existing state of things, shews a criminal inattention to duty, which it is impossible to justify. Conscientious men, and the most proper to fill the office and to promote the moral and religious interests of the parish, are driven from its acceptance, and the church deprived of their useful service. Let me beseech the rulers of the church to take this matter into their most serious deliberation; and let them, without delay, form all their questions in such a way, and on such subjects, as can properly be asked and answered, without entering into those personal accusations which would expose them to the penalty of the civil law. This, while it afforded relief to all who have any regard for an oath, would procure that information which, if properly followed up, might lead to the most happy and profitable results.

As things are, nothing can be either honestly and safely done, or honestly left undone. This double stab at the conscience must, when considered, appear both criminal and horrible. It tends more than any thing else, and in the most

sacred place, to remove all regard to the sacred character of an oath; and to bring into much contempt both the civil constitution, and the religious establishment of the land. Should the rulers of the church decline this most necessary measure, it surely will not pass the notice of the ministers of the state. Something must be done, and done soon; or there will probably be a resistance made that will try whether our bishops will reform the evil, or whether they will compel men, against their consciences, before the sacred altar of the Lord, to take oaths which they must violate, or subject themselves to the dangerous penalty of the civil law.

I am aware that ingenious and casuistical men may soften, extenuate, and try to explain away, much of the offensive part of this matter. But why suffer men's understandings, consciences, and common sense, to be burdened and insulted with that which it requires all the ingenuity of the most subtle to make any advance in explaining away? Let the thing be reformed at once, and made clear and plain before common understandings, and to plain honest men. Let the way be made clear before them, and they will walk in it. As it is, they will not move a step; and this is the reason why all, or nearly all, the papers are thus returned,—"We have nothing to present."

Beside this, it is a matter of the greatest importance for the interests of religion and the

church, and the spiritual welfare of the people, that every bishop should be well acquainted with all the clergy under him. Bishop Burnet, addressing his own order on this subject, says, "We must keep an eye upon them continually, and be applying reproofs, exhortations, and encouragements, as occasion offers: we must enter into all their concerns, and espouse every interest of that part of the church that is assigned to their care: we must see them as often as we can, and encourage them to come frequently to us; and must live in all things with them, as a father with his children."

This, I take it, was the design of God in their appointment; and it was also the design of the founders of the church established in this land. Reason points out its strict propriety, and the necessity that they who ordain, and give their sanction to labour in the great and holy work of the Christian ministry, should be well acquainted with their religious principles, labours, and characters. This their name and office imports; and they should know, and seek no greater pleasure, next to the favour of God, than that which arises from their wise and well-directed labours for the general good, evidently attended with the blessing of God. This will require other and more intimate and friendly intercourse with them, than either a general visitation, or the mere transaction of official business can possibly afford. How

this is to be brought about and managed, it is not my business to explain. This, however, I will say, that when mens' hearts are truly engaged in the great work assigned them; when they seek in all their movements the honour of God and the salvation of men;—and are anxious to engage and promote those who are the best adapted to advance the interests of true religion in the church and the world;—means and opportunities will never be wanting to effect the intercourse required. Hooker on this subject says, "At the hands of a bishop, the first thing looked for is a care of the clergy under him; a care, that in doing good, they may have whatever comforts and encouragements his countenance, authority, and place may yield. Otherwise, what heart shall they have to proceed in their painful course, all sorts of men besides being so ready to malign, despise, and every way oppress them? Let them find nothing but disdain in bishops; in the enemies of present government, if that way they list to betake themselves, all kind of favourable and friendly help; unto which part think we it likely that men having wit, courage, and stomach, will incline?" E. P. B. 7.

To me, whatever some may think, it is painful to find fault; and especially where the rulers of the church are concerned. But when such a man as Hooker can lead the way, I shall not complain, though unjustly charged with want of

due respect. Truth, with me, is of more importance than either the good or bad opinion of men. The truth, therefore, must be spoken; and I think I shall not be accused either of violating or exceeding it, when I say, that *that* first thing which is looked for from the hands of a bishop, —the care of the clergy,—that in *doing good* they may have whatever comfort and encouragement, their countenance, authority, and place may yield, —is not afforded in this country, to the most efficient, holy, useful, and laborious clergy of the church. Well known is it every where, and almost to every person, with what disdain they have been treated for near a century. And though their character, principles, and usefulness, are now better known, and even sometimes acknowledged, yet how many bishops are there that dare shew them their full countenance, or encourage them in their painful course, by bestowing upon them any of that patronage which their authority and place may yield? Are there not numbers, almost in every diocese, some of them men of the first-rate talents, and who have been labouring in the most diligent and conscientious way for twenty, thirty, and even forty years, perhaps only on a small curacy, or lectureship, which has hardly kept them from starving; none of which have been promoted to a single benefice, while all the best preferment is conferred, two or three deep, on raw, young, and inexperienced

persons, whose only merit is that they have been someway related to, or are the sons and favourites of gentlemen and lords, and very often no way connected with the diocese. To the credit of those worthy men it is, that however they have been maligned and despised by the world, and neglected and disdained by their superiors, they are almost to a man sincerely attached to the present government, and to the church to which they belong. Had not this been the case, many of them, from their talents, piety, and usefulness, might have made their way in other quarters, if so disposed; and they would have met with all kinds of favourable and friendly help: but they prefer their principles to preferment of this description; and had rather die in poverty and want, than forsake the church they love, and are appointed to serve.

What their lordships may think of this matter, it is not for me to say: but they ought to be apprised that we live in times when the eyes of men are open. They have now some idea about the fitness of things: they therefore judge of men, not by the office they sustain, but by the efforts they make to promote the general advantage. They think, and think wisely, that deserving merit ought to be encouraged and rewarded, in preference to name and family, when there is no such claim, or when it has not been tried. The farther they advance in what is now contemptuously

called ' the march of intellect,' the more formidable will their opinion of the fitness of men and things be felt and made to appear. For myself, I can expect nothing: but I am not so old that I may not live to see changes that will make the heart of the stoutest faint. I may be considered as an alarmist; and I may be deceived: but the state of our affairs is such, that in my mind, we are approaching very near unto, perhaps the greatest crisis, that either the church or the nation ever saw. Into politics I wish not to enter: they are not my forte, neither do they suit my taste. I have had other and higher objects in view; and could I draw towards them that attention which their importance demands, I should then have hope that something might be done; which if done soon, might, if not avert, yet tend to mitigate the violence of the impending storm.

Beside this, the bishops are required, both by the exhortation of the Apostle, and their own solemn engagements, "To feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." That which God hath thus most dearly bought, must be of all other things the most important and precious in his sight. The food by which this holy and interesting society is to be fed, and nourished up unto everlasting life, it hath pleased God to intrust to the ministers of his grace. They are, therefore, his stewards to manage this great concern; and, under the

direction of his word and grace, to give to every man his portion in due season. "It is required of stewards," says the Apostle, "to be found faithful." Their duty therefore is not only to live, to labour, and to preach, as well as all the ministers under their care; "but to labour more eminently, and to lay themselves out more entirely in the work of the Gospel." So says Bishop Burnet. And some of our early bishops, impressed with the obligation, "that where much is given, much is required again," threw off much of their secular state, and went constantly preaching about, almost in every church of their dioceses. Good old Latimer, with his Bible and spectacles fastened to his girdle, and almost alone, performed on foot these preaching visitations. "To the very last," says Fox, "he preached for the most part every Sunday twice, to the no small shame of all other loitering and unpreaching prelates, which occupy great rooms, and do little good; and that much more to their shame, because he being a sore bruised man by the fall of a tree, and above seventy-six years of age, took so little ease and care of sparing himself, to do the people good." His labours were blessed in a wonderful manner. God honoured him in the eyes of his people, and in the conversion of thousands. He obtained at length the crown of martyrdom, and a still higher crown in the kingdom of his Heavenly Father. To follow

on foot the high and holy example of this truly holy and devoted servant of the Lord, whose name will live to the end of time, is perhaps not required. But the times, as well as their duty, require that our bishops should be all animated with the same holy zeal to promote the honour of God, and the salvation of men. To preach much, and often, in season and out of season; and thus by their example to give to all their clergy a new stimulus to the same active and holy labours, is certainly required. Oh, how greatly would it strengthen the hands of pious and devoted ministers, to have all their labours thus countenanced by the example of their superiors! To see the bishops and the clergy of the church, all in their particular and respective spheres, thus animated, holy, active, and abundant in labour, would soon bring back the hearts of the people, raise her in the general esteem to the high rank she was destined to sustain, and render her the greatest of all blessings to this divided and distracted land.

The people, generally speaking, who pay any serious attention to religion and their souls, trouble not themselves with curious and quibbling questions, either about conformity or dissent. What they wish to see in the ministers of religion, is a spirit and conduct agreeable to their high and holy profession. They wish to see and hear men, whose hearts are truly devoted to their work, and who consider not their lives dear unto them,

so that they may fulfil the ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. What they wish to hear is the Gospel in all its truth, fulness, and simplicity. Where they cannot hear this, they make little or no account either of place or person. The true preaching of the cross is that alone which draws all thoughtful, serious, penitent, and devout persons unto it. Even others see in it something that excites their attention, and wins their regard. And though they cannot give a just reason of the cause, they naturally conclude that there must be something very important attached to it, when it had its foundation in the death and sacrifice of the only-begotten son of God.

This is the true foundation on which the real church of Christ is built. To adhere to the gospel of the Redeemer, in all its truth, fulness, freeness, and simplicity, is the only bond of the church's unity and safety. Love it—preach it—and live up to it—and the church will stand and flourish;—but neglect it—depart from it—preach something else in its stead—and live like the unthinking world;—the church will fall, her destruction will be inevitable. This is the situation in which she stands. A right decision therefore must be made, made soon, and adhered to in the spirit required in the word of God; or all the power of the state cannot possibly preserve her in existence. This

the present posture of affairs clearly indicates. We are brought very near the greatest crisis that ever the church or the nation has seen. Perhaps half the population of the country have left the church: a very considerable portion of the remainder are either wavering, or totally indifferent whether she stands or falls. Some, and not a few, are seeking her downfall; and all who differ from her, are urging their claims in such a way, that it is hard to say whether another year may not seal her ruin. And should it please God on the one hand so far to punish us for our sins, for our contempt of his gospel, and neglect of our duties, as to deliver us to the rage of our enemies, we shall have nothing to look for but a persecution more dreadful than any perhaps recorded in history: but should he hear our prayers, and accept of our repentance and our return to that from whence we have departed, and so give us a happy issue out of all the dangers with which we are threatened, we shall then have a prospect of a state of things which may exceed the wishes of the most devout and serious Christian. "But nothing," says an excellent prelate, addressing his brethren on another occasion, "can so certainly avert the one, or prepare us to glorify God in it, if he in his justice and wisdom should call us to a fiery trial of our faith and patience, as the serious minding of our functions, of our duties and obligations, the confessing of our sins, and the correcting of our

errors. We shall be very unfit to suffer for our religion, much less to die for it, and very little able to endure the hardships of persecution, if our consciences are reproaching us all the while, that we have procured these things to ourselves; and that by the ill use of our prosperity, and other advantages, we have kindled a fire to consume us. But as it may please God, according to the riches of his mercy, and for the glory of his great name, to hear the prayers that may be offered up by all the serious and devout, rather than the cry of those abominations that are still among us, nothing therefore is so likely to move him to this, as our lying often between the porch and the altar, and interceding with God for our people; and giving ourselves wholly to the ministry of the word, and to prayer. If the consideration of these things does not excite us to set about the reforming of every thing that may be amiss or defective among us; to study much and to labour hard; to lead strict and exemplary lives, and so to stop the mouths and overcome the prejudices of all that divide from us: this will make us look like a nation cast off and forsaken of God, which is nigh unto cursing, and whose end is burning. We have reason to conclude, that our present respite is the last essay of God's goodness to us; and that if we bring forth no fruit under it, the next sentence shall be, "cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" What

others may think of these matters I know not: but they lie heavy on my thoughts continually; and have all concurred to draw this treatise from me; which I have written with all the sincerity of heart, and purity of intention, that I should have had, if I had known that I had been to die at the conclusion of it, immediately to answer for it to God.

To him I humbly offer it up, together with my most earnest prayers, that the design may become truly effectual, and have its full accomplishment; which, when I shall see, I shall then with joy say,—" Nunc dimittis," &c. &c.

FINIS.

J. Seeley, Printer, Buckingham.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK.

EXPOSITORY LECTURES

ON

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS;

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